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THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF INDIA

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THE purpose of this series of small volumes on the leading forms which religious life has taken in India is to produce really reliable information for the use of all who are seeking the welfare of India. Editors and writers alike desire to work in the spirit of the best modern science, looking only for the truth. But while doing so and seeking to bring to the interpretation of the systems under review such imagination and sympathy as characterise the best study in the domain of religion to-day, they believe they are able to shed on their work fresh light drawn from the close religious intercourse which they have each had with the people who live by the faith herein described; and their study of the relevant literature has in every instance been largely supplemented by persistent questioning of those likely to be able to give information. In each case the religion described is brought into relation with Christianity. It is believed that all readers in India at least will recognise the value of this practical method of bringing out the salient features of Indian religious life.

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF INDIA

THE CHAITANYA MOVEMENT

A Study of the Vaishṇavism of Bengal

BY

MELVILLE T. KENNEDY, M.A.

WARDEN, YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
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PREFACE

THIS book is an attempt to accomplish an exceedingly difficult task. It requires considerable temerity at any time for one to write of another's religion, an endeavour calling for so generous a measure of insight, understanding and sympathy. In these days, when race consciousness has become so keen, and national feeling so sensitive to any hint of criticism between East and West, an undertaking such as this book becomes doubly difficult; for it deals with personalities, customs, and ideas, of living rather than academic interest, warm and palpitating, because instinct with the passionate devotion of many hearts. Such a work can hope to succeed only as it is done in absolute sincerity, with scrupulous fairness, and with a constant sense of one's limitation in knowledge. I have tried to write in this spirit. However short of this high standard the book may fall, and in spite of its shortcomings, I trust it will prove useful to all who wish to know more of the religious thought and life of Bengal. To the devout Vaishṇava himself it may be of service as a stimulus to fresh valuation of familiar religious usage.

I am indebted to many friends for help in various ways which can hardly be acknowledged here. Of these, I am under special obligation to Dr. Bhāgavata Kumāra Gosvāmī, Śāstri, of Hugli College, for the unfailing generosity with which he has let me avail myself of his immense knowledge of Vaishṇavism. It seems hardly

necessary to add that, although he has given freely of information, I am wholly responsible for the use made of the facts, and for the interpretation given of the movement. It is a pleasure, also, to acknowledge, with affectionate gratitude, the information and the help given by many of my students during the past ten years.

Calcutta, M. T. KENNEDY.
1st December, 1924.

CONTENTS

CHAP. PAGE.

I. THE BACKGROUND OF THE MOVEMENT
Social and Religious Conditions—The Vaishṇava Heritage—The Influence of Buddhism 1

II. THE LIFE OF CHAITANYA. FIRST PERIOD
Boyhood and Youth—The Great Change—Absorption in Bhakti—Beginnings of the Movement—Opposition and the Final Step 13

III. THE LIFE OF CHAITANYA. SECOND PERIOD
Farewell to Nadia—Introduction to Purī—The Long Pilgrimage — Experiences by the Way — Joys of Bhakti in Purī—The Brindāban Pilgrimage—Final Years at Purī 29

IV. CHAITANYA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SECT
The Impress of His Character and Personality—The Power of His Religious Experience—Social Consequences of His Bhakti 52

V. THE HISTORY OF THE SECT
The Influence of Nityānanda—How the Movement Grew—Development at Brindāban—The Generation following Chaitanya—Seventeenth Century Revival —Śyāmānanda and the Winning of Orissa—Vaishnavism in Assam—Two Centuries of Decline—The Modern Revival—Influence on Bengal Society .. 60

VI. THE TEACHING OF THE SECT
Theological—(1) *The Idea of God*—(2) *The Doctrine of Incarnation*—(3) *The Conception of Sin*—(4) *Salvation*—(5) *Heaven and Future Existence*—(6) *Revelation*—(7) *Man and the World*—Religious—(1) *The Life of Bhakti*—(2) *The Attainment of Bhakti*—(3) *The Emotions of Bhakti*—(4) *The Use of Images*—(5) *A Bhakti Shorter Catechism* —Ethical and Social—(1) *The Vaishṇava Character*

—(2) *Attitude towards Caste*—(3) *By-products of Bhakti* 88

VII. The Literature of the Sect
Biographical—Historical—Theological and Ritual—Drama—Hymnology 123

VIII. The Sect as It is To-Day: Its Orders
I. The Four Classes—A. The Gosvāmīs—(1) *Origin and Development*—(2) *Functions and Relations*—(3) *Character and Standing*—B. The Gṛihasthas—C. The Vairāgīs—(1) *The Requirements of Bhek*—(2) *The Life of the Ākhṛās*—(3) *Female Ascetics*—(4) *Principal Ākhṛās*—(5) *Death Customs*—D. The Jāt Vairāgīs 148

IX. The Sect as It is To-day: Its Cult
Temples and Shrines—Temple Worship—Ākhṛā Worship—Domestic Worship—Public Worship—Festivals—Melās and Mahotsavas—Secret Forms of Worship—(1) *Sahajiyās*—(2) *Kiśorībhajās*—(3) *Śrī Rūpa Sevā*—(4) *Neṛā-Neṛīs*—Sub-Sects—*Karttābhajās*—*Bāuls*—*Darbesh*—*Shains*—*Jaganmohinī Sect* 180

X. The Chaitanya Movement in Relation to Christianity
Ethical Standards—*Ideas in Common*—*Differing Ideas*—Social Idealism—Theological Ideas—(1) *The Doctrine of God*—(2) *The Doctrine of Salvation*—(3) *The Doctrine of Heaven and the Future*—(4) *The Doctrine of Incarnation*—(5) *The Doctrine of Sin*—Theory and Practice of the Religious Life (1) *The Experience of God*—(2) *The Imagery of Devotion*—(3) *Mysticism and Saintliness*—Eroticism and Its Significance 217

Index 259

List of Illustrations

1. The Gopīnāth Temple, Brindāban .. *Facing page* 46
2. The Jugal Kiśor Temple, Brindāban .. .. „ 47
3. The Govindjī Temple, Brindāban .. .. „ 66
4. The Madan Mohan Temple, Brindāban .. „ 67
5. The Jot Baṅgla Temple, Vishṇupur, Bengal .. „ 86
6. The Madan Mohan Temple, Vishṇupur, Bengal „ 87
7. A Vairāgiṇī of Brindāban .. .. .. „ 173
8. Gilded Image of Gaurāṅga at Navadvīp .. „ 174
9. Wayside Chaitanya Shrine near the Bathing-ghat, Bāgh-bazar, Calcutta .. .. „ 174
10. Mahant of the Tetultalla Ākhṛā, Calcutta .. „ 184
11. Group of Vairāgīs in Tetultalla Ākhṛā, Calcutta „ 184
12. Old Vaishṇava Temple at Kardaha .. .. „ 185
13. A Kardaha Shrine .. .. „ 185
14. The Baṛa Ākhṛā at Navadvīp .. .. „ 185
15. A Young Chaitanya Vairāgī famed as a Singer in Brindāban .. .. „ 214
16. A Retired Asst.-Surgeon from Assam living at Brindāban as a Vairāgī .. .. .. „ 214
17. A Rural Vairāgī with his Vairāgiṇī from the Dacca District .. .. „ 215
18. A Pair of Mendicants at the Chaitanya Birthday Festival, at Navadvīp .. .. .. „ 215

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Antiquities of Orissa, by R. L. Mitra	*Antiquities.*
Archæological Survey of Mayurbhanj, by N. N. Vasu	*A.S.M.*
Chaitanya and His Companions, by D. C. Sen ..	*C.C.*
Chaitanya and His Age, by D. C. Sen	*C.H.A.*
Chaitanya Bhāgavata, by Vṛindāvan Dās (Basumati Press, 3rd Edition, Calcutta)	*Ch.Bh.*
Chaitanya Charitāmṛita, by Kṛishṇadās Kavirāj (edition by Haris Chandra Mazumdar, Calcutta, 1922)	*Ch.Ch.*
Chaitanya Maṅgal, by Jayānanda (edition by Atul Krishna Gosvami, Calcutta)	*Ch.M.*
Chaitanya's Life and Teachings, by J. N. Sarkar, 2nd Ed.	*C.L.T.*
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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF THE MOVEMENT

Social and Religious Conditions

The Bengal into which Chaitanya was born, more than 400 years ago, was no Utopia, social or religious. Various factors united to produce a state of society commonly looked back upon as the dark period of Bengal history. Chief among these was alien rule. The Moslem conquerors of India had extended their sway eastward until practically all of Bengal lay in their power. Thus the country was dominated by a force alien both in race and religion. Friction was the natural result. Repression and religious persecution became features of Hindu life. Although the ordinary life of the people went on in accustomed ways without much open molestation, yet there was ever present the sense of an alien power above and about them, at enmity with all things Hindu, and ready to make that enmity felt in forceful ways as occasion offered. Hindu temples had been transformed into mosques in large numbers in the early days of Moslem rule, and instances were not lacking of the continuing "will to power" of the Islamic rulers, expressed in rigorous suppression or aggression, forced conversions, and the like. Hinduism was hated by them and heartily despised; its festivals, images and worship tolerated with difficulty; its obliteration desired. Naturally the religious life of the people was not wholly at ease.

Within Hinduism itself the oppressive aspects of the caste system were not lacking. To the tyranny without was added a social tyranny within. Out of the more or less chaotic conditions left by a disintegrating Buddhism, the Brāhman architects of Hinduism had

sought to ensure stability by laying the caste foundations solid and strong. The climax of this effort is seen in the great work of Raghunandan Bhaṭṭāchārya, who was a famous scholar in Chaitanya's boyhood. His laborious compilation from the law books, codifying the huge mass of rules governing social usage within caste, is still the absolute authority in Bengal Hindu life to-day. This famous work was doubtless the crowning expression of a process long going on, by which the social structure was being fixed in unchanging forms. Within the lines thus laid down the life of the people proceeded with no idea or opportunity of change, no escape from the burdens involved, no incentive to advancement.

The domination of the Brāhman over much of society was the crowning feature of this social order. There was no escaping the rule of the Brāhmanical hierarchy in all matters of worship. Excepting among aboriginal cults and the remnants of Buddhism, their service as priests was absolutely essential. Their spiritual superiority to all men was firmly established and recognized everywhere, almost divine honour being paid them by many. They alone could teach the sacred law, perform the ancient sacrifices, or conduct the manifold rites and ceremonies essential to Hindu life. The innumerable forms enjoined by the law books to be observed by all good Hindus were absolutely dependent for their efficacy upon their being performed by the Brāhman. This amazing control over the religious life of the people made the Brāhman master, practically, over the whole of life, since in India no social fact falls outside the purview of religion. Every important event in the individual and family life from birth to death has its appropriate observance, the ritual of which is prescribed in the law books, to be interpreted and administered only by the Brāhman, and to be neglected or defied at the risk of complete social ostracism in this life and utter misery in the hereafter. Rarely, if ever, has any social order conferred on one group of men power over their fellows so far-reaching and so unlimited.

Irrespective of this Brāhmanic control, the religious life itself was at a low ebb in Bengal at the time of Chaitanya's birth. The worship of deities hardly above the animistic stage was strongly entrenched in every village. Over these, following the priestly policy, had been loosely thrown the mantle of Hinduism. Cults of aboriginal origin, such as that of Manasā Devī (the serpent goddess), Dharma Ṭhakkur, Dakshiṇ Rāi (the tiger god), Chaṇḍī, and many others attached to the Śākta[1] sect, were widely prevalent. The poison of the *tāntric*[2] practices left behind by Buddhism and also deep set in current Hinduism had gone far in the social order, and exercised a peculiarly debasing influence on religious thought. The Śākta sect, which was probably the principal element in the Hinduism of that day, was neither a spiritual nor an æsthetic influence in religion. Its animal sacrifice was a coarsening feature, while the tāntric strain of licentiousness in the theory and practice of its *Vāmāchārī*[3] school gave it tremendous power for evil. If we may judge from contemporary works, the conditions of religious life were in sore need of reformation. To be sure, most of these contemporary writers were Vaishṇava, and therefore liable to a charge of sectarian bias in their animadversions. But something more than the charge of partisanship is needed to explain away the volume and unanimity of reference in the numerous Vaishṇava works of the sixteenth century to the widespread evil aspects of religious worship and practice in their day.

It was amidst such conditions that Chaitanya was born; in a society often sorely pressed upon from without, and at a low ebb, both morally and spiritually,

[1] From the word *śakti*, energy. They are worshippers of Śiva's consort (Kālī, Durgā, etc.) as his divine energy, the active principle of the universe.

[2] The *tantras* are the literature of the Śākta sect. The practices referred to have to do with the erotic development which characterised the worship of one group in this sect.

[3] The Left-hand school, given to degraded and obscene rites, in contradistinction to the *Dakshiṇāchārī*, the Right-hand school of the Śāktas, who are respectable in their worship.

within. The city of Navadvīp, his birthplace and the home of his youth and early manhood, added to the conditions enumerated a somewhat materialistic but highly intellectual atmosphere, characteristic of the Sanskrit learning which gave it fame. It was no mean city for a reformer's birthplace. The reputation of its *ṭols*[1] drew scholars from all parts of India, for in the *Navya Nyāya*, the new system of logic, they were second to none. The names of many of the Navadvīp *paṇḍits* are still reckoned among the great names of Sanskrit scholarship. One author states that at this period the city covered an area of 16 square miles. The spirit of its learning was largely secularistic, its chief interest being academic rather than deep concern with the problems of the soul and the Infinite. The result was an atmosphere sceptical rather than sympathetic, and anything but warmly receptive to the type of religious revival soon to spring up in its midst.

The Vaishṇava Heritage

It is a mistake to think of Chaitanya as in any sense the originator of Vaishṇavism in Bengal. This faith had had its adherents here for centuries, and although never very numerous they were not an unimportant group. Some of the chief figures among Bengal's poets drew their inspiration from the Vaishṇava scriptures. Jayadeva with his *Gītagovinda*,[2] in melodious Sanskrit; Vidyāpati, the sensuous singer of Mithilā (modern Bihar), whose songs in Bengali dress have been more popular than in their original tongue; Umāpati and Chaṇḍī Dās—these great names in Bengali literary history all owe much to Vaishṇavism, and witness to its influence long before Chaitanya's day.

It is necessary at this point to attempt a very brief sketch of the development of Vaishṇavism, in order

[1] The colleges of the ancient Sanskrit learning. Students lived with a teacher, and were kept by him until the completion of their study. Several of these Sanskrit schools are still to be found in Navadvīp.

[2] Kṛishṇa-song. Govinda is one of the names of Kṛishṇa.

that the Chaitanya movement may be understood in its proper setting. Since it shares the Kṛishṇa cult and the fundamental theology of that cult with other sects of Vaishṇavism, it is well to trace the rise of these ideas as a whole.

The worshipper of Vishṇu can claim a long tradition, for this god is found in the Vedas. He early became a popular figure, around whom grew up a sectarian cult in which the incarnation idea played a prominent part. Very early in this Vishṇu cult, probably, appeared the image worship of the temples, as opposed to the worship of sacrifice of the Vedic tradition. A distinctive feature, also, of this widespread cult was the rise of *bhakti*[1] as the heart of worship, an emotional service of love and devotion to the god. The figures of Rāma and Kṛishṇa early arise as incarnations of Vishṇu, and become supreme objects of devotion leading to the varied development of the sects. The great epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, enshrine the stories of Rāma and Kṛishṇa and the theology that arises out of them. Kṛishṇa was at first the god of a petty black clan, it seems, then came under the wing of Vishṇu, and was called the son of Vasudeva. Later he becomes an incarnation of Vishṇu.

Parallel with this development there arose the great Hindu philosophies—the Vedānta, the Sāṁkhya and the Yoga—all having great influence. About the beginning of the Christian era a notable point in the history is reached, with the attempt on the part of some keen mind to combine these philosophies and appropriate them for the exaltation of Kṛishṇa worship. This effort is made in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, a remarkable work which identifies Kṛishṇa with the eternal Brahman, but retains his personal nature and thus forms a truly monotheistic faith. After the philosophies and epics, there arose the *Purāṇas*, which are important in Vaishṇava literature. They are full of mythology, but

[1] Passionate devotion, one of the three great ways (*mārga*) to Release.

also contain much theology. Later came the *Saṁhitās*, practical works, each meant to be the guide-book of some Vaishṇava group in all matters of theology, ritual, construction of temples and images, etc.

Of the great sects of Vaishṇavism, the Śrī-Vaishṇavas of the Tamil country are the most inclusive, forming their system on the whole of Vaishṇavism and recognising all the incarnations of Vishṇu. The other sects are devoted to particular incarnations, with the figure of Kṛishṇa most popular. The Kṛishṇa of these sects, however, is a very different figure from that of the Gītā, and yet is identified with him. Here he is the youthful cowherd of the Braj country,[1] hero of wonderful feats and amorous exploits among his milk-maid companions, the *Gopīs* of Brindāban. This Kṛishṇa-gopī legend arose early in the neighbourhood of Brindāban. It is hardly mentioned in the Mahābhārata, where, in the older sections, Kṛishṇa appears as "a powerful demi-god or divine hero," and only in the later portions as an incarnation of the Supreme. The story develops in the *Harivaṁśa* and in the *Vishṇu Purāṇa*, and comes to full bloom in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. This work, written some time about A.D. 900, has had a most notable influence upon the course of Vaishṇavism. Its purpose is the glorification of the Brindāban *līlā*,[2] the story of Kṛishṇa and the gopīs, and it exalts this legend as the ideal of bhakti with a wealth of emotional fervour that gives it great creative power. Most of the later important sects of Vaishṇavism are dependent upon this writing.

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* there is a suggestion of a favourite gopī with whom Kṛishṇa wanders and sports alone, but she is unnamed. Some later and unknown writer, possibly as early as A.D. 1000 and probably at Brindāban, enlarged upon this theme and created the figure of *Rādhā*, the chief of the gopīs and the beloved

[1] The district of Mathurā and Brindāban.

[2] Sport. The whole series of episodes developed in the legend is conceived of as an earthly moment of the eternal Divine sport.

mistress of Kṛishṇa. From this time on the cult of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa developed, Rādhā occupying a position of very great importance. This cult spread eventually throughout the north and into the south, only the Śrī-Vaishṇavas, the Mādhvas and the Vaishṇavas of the Marāṭhā country refusing to be drawn to the worship of Rādhā.

The Mādhvas, founded by Madhvāchārya early in the thirteenth century, was probably the first sect based on the Brindāban līlā. His work is dependent on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, but he does not go beyond it and therefore Rādhā has no place in the sect's devotions. Madhva was dualistic in his philosophy. Although he exalts bhakti to Kṛishṇa this is not made the exclusive worship. The sect is particularly strong in the south.

The Vishṇusvāmīs, who developed next, had little to distinguish them from the Mādhvas, except their worship of Rādhā in conjunction with Kṛishṇa. Otherwise their system is much the same as that of the Mādhvas. This group have largely disappeared as a sect.

A third group arose in the thirteenth century led by Nimbārka. He developed a middle position in his philosophical system, called *bhedābheda* or *dvaitādvaita*, a dualistic monism, by which God and the soul are conceived of as at the same time one and yet distinct. His sect is important for its exaltation of Rādhā not simply as the chief of the gopīs, as in the Vishṇusvāmī sect, but as the eternal consort of Kṛishṇa become incarnate with him in the Brindāban scenes. Nimbārka made the worship of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa exclusive in his sect, thus departing from the orthodox *Smārta*[1] position. It will be noted that Nimbārka rescues Rādhā from the immoral implication of much of the literature, and gives to her a dignity unattained elsewhere.

No other Rādhā-Kṛishṇa sects seem to have arisen for a period of two centures. But early in the sixteenth century the Vallabhāchāryas and the Chaitanyas sprang

[1] Based on *smṛiti*, the law codes. Particularly it involves Vedic observance, worship of five gods (Vishṇu, Śiva, Durgā, Sūrya and Gaṇeśa) and usually allegiance to Śaṅkara.

up at about the same time. Vallabhāchārya was much nearer Śaṅkara's monism in his philosophical position than is true of these other sects, but in his theology he seems to have followed Nimbārka's theory of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa. There has always been a close connection assumed between the Vallabhāchāryas and the Vishṇusvāmīs, but the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa ideas, as well as the philosophical positions, are quite different. It is a fact, however, that the Vishṇusvāmī sect was largely absorbed by the younger and more vigorous body.

The time and manner of the spread of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult into Bengal is very difficult to determine. There is no history of the process, and the literary records are far from complete. Indeed, we are in the dark about the whole early history of the Rādhā story, and how it spread across north India. It seems a reasonable supposition, as we have said, that the name appears and her cult begins at Brindāban some time in the eleventh century, but what happened then is not clear. Enthusiastic popular songs in the vernacular probably sprang up, and in this way it is likely that the flame of this ardent worship spread across the country. That it did spread is clearly shown by the fact of Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*,[1] glowing verses in Sanskrit on Rādhā and Kṛishṇa written in Bengal about the end of the twelfth century. This fact constitutes one of the difficulties of our theory; how is it that the first-known lyrics about Rādhā are found in far-away Bengal?[2] Another diffi-

[1] A brief description of this famous work will be found in Frazer's *A Literary History of India*, pp. 339-44.

[2] This theory concerning the origin of the Rādhā cult, which follows very closely the view set forth in Dr. Farquhar's *Outline of Religious Literature*, although setting the date somewhat earlier, depends upon the supposition that there was much commonplace song in various dialects in the centuries preceding Jayadeva. This would account for the artistic character of Jayadeva's work and also for the great Braj lyrics of the sixteenth century, while the excellence of this later poetry would tend to explain the total disappearance of the earlier songs.

It should be noted that some Vaishṇava scholars contend for a much earlier rise of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult. One theory, for instance, seeks its origin in the astrological lore which is in evidence in the Purāṇic

culty is the lack of any material evidence of the cult in the Braj country. No great temples were dedicated to Rādhā before the sixteenth century, even the Vishṇusvāmī and Nimbārka sects having only small shrines.

The development of this cult in Bengal was coloured by conditions more or less peculiar to this province. The particular relation of the Chaitanya movement to the preceding sects, and its indebtedness to them, will be dealt with in succeeding chapters. It is our concern here to indicate the influence upon this Vaishṇava tradition of the environment into which it came. In Bengal, Rādhākṛishṇaism came into contact with tantricism in both Hindu and Buddhist guise. This growth had had a long history in Bengal, the earliest tantras, both Buddhist and Hindu, appearing about the seventh century A.D. These strange scriptures had a marked development on the erotic side, and produced a gross and debasing system both in idea and practice. The Vāmāchārī school of the Śākta sect is the Hindu product, and the *Sahajiyā* cult (the way of nature) seems to have been its counterpart in the decaying Buddhism of the centuries previous to Chaitanya's day. Emphasis upon sexual passion and the religious value of sexual intercourse is the characteristic of this tantricism, based upon the exaltation of the female principle in the Universe. The vile *chakrapūjā* (circle worship), resulting in promiscuous intercourse, is its full flower in Śāktism, while in the Sahajiyā cult it teaches the

literature from an early time. It is pointed out that the name of Rādhā appears in the work of the fifth century lexicographer, Amara Siṁha, and also much earlier in a collection of songs dating, perhaps, from the first century. The work referred to is the Gāthā Saptasatī, compiled by Hāla Satavāhana, and is a collection of erotic songs in prākṛit, many of which are undoubtedly very old. Most Western scholars would unhesitatingly attribute the single occurrence of the name Rādhā in this collection to interpolation. But, granted that the name may be found early, this fact proves only that such a name was in use; it does not establish the fact of the cult. The facts of Vaishṇava history are overwhelmingly against an early date for this cult, since the name and person of Rādhā as the favourite of Kṛishṇa are absolutely unknown in all the sectarian literature before the *Gītagovind* in the twelfth century.

attainment of salvation through the worship and sexual use of a beautiful maiden.

This is the sort of thing with which Vaishṇavism came into contact in Bengal. There can be no doubt of the widespread nature of the tāntric teaching. With the passing of Buddhism this tāntric element still remained, a legacy of the very worst elements of what had been a great system. The Śākta cult of Hinduism was powerful and active. It will be evident, at once, how exposed to temptation Kṛishṇa-Vaishṇavism must have been in this atmosphere, considering the highly erotic possibilities of its own cult. Clear evidence of tāntric influence upon Vaishṇavism is found in the life of the important Bengali poet, named Chaṇḍī Dās, who was born about A.D. 1380, a full century before Chaitanya. He was a Śākta, and had inherited from his father the position of priest of the goddess *Bāśulī* in his native village in the Birbhum district. He lost his priestly service and was outcasted from society, because of his love for a washerwoman's daughter, named Rāmī, for whom he gave up everything. He celebrated the young woman's graces in glowing verse and in ardent exposition of the Sahajiyā creed. As his best-known songs are in praise of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, it is evident that he became a devotee of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult and brought into it the Sahajiyā influence. Chaṇḍī Dās has always been treasured by Vaishṇavas as one of their greatest singers, in spite of his being the chief exponent of the Sahajiyā teaching. Although Chaitanya used Chaṇḍī Dās's songs with greatest delight, also the lyrics of Jayadeva and Vidyāpati, which are highly erotic, we do not find him lending any countenance to the Sahajiyā practice. During his lifetime and immediately after, this teaching, although undoubtedly widespread, does not seem to have gained much foothold in the movement. Soon after, however, it came in in full force, with a considerable literature to testify to its influence.

The sect most influential in Bengal before Chaitanya, and with which he seems to have had most connection,

was the Mādhvas. His personal relationships, with friends and teachers, were all within this sect. The actual Vaishṇava community does not seem to have been numerous, at least in or about Navadvīp. The leading figure in this group at the time of Chaitanya's birth was Advaitāchārya, a Brāhman of considerable learning, who afterward became one of the two leaders associated with Chaitanya in the new movement. About him were gathered a number of devout men, unsatisfied in the midst of a materialistic worship, and finding an outlet for their spiritual longing in the emotional abandon of the Kṛishṇa bhakti. These men gathered daily in certain homes to listen to the reading of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and to sing ardent hymns to Kṛishṇa and Rādhā. As a religious group they do not seem to have had much standing in the community. They were regarded with indifferent scorn by the Brāhmans and the proud scholars of the ṭols. In this small group, however, were present in latent form most of the characteristic features which were to mark the spread of the vigorous movement ever since associated with the name of Chaitanya.

The Influence of Buddhism

Beyond the tāntric contribution of Buddhism already treated, there should be noted the more general absorption of Buddhist adherents and ideas into the new sect. This was more marked in Orissa, where Buddhism continued longer than in Bengal. It had possessed a great centre at Purī long before the Hindu shrine arose there, and the whole countryside was full of Buddhism. It was probably the prevailing religious influence among the common people until Chaitanya's time. At any rate, it seems clear that when the Vaishṇava preachers, a generation after Chaitanya, swept the countryside with their proselytizing, many of their adherents came out of Buddhism. These people evidently brought much of their old thought with them into the new fold. The principal Vaishṇava poets of Orissa, for instance, who are known as the six Dāses,

and whose songs are household property, were still much under Buddhist influence. They became followers of Chaitanya when his movement swept that area, and created much of the Vaishṇava literature of Orissa, but their thought, while cast in Vaishṇava forms, still retained much that was distinctively Buddhist.[1]

Too much has been made of the debt of Vaishṇavism to Buddhism. While there was an undoubted kinship of spirit in many ways between them, and therefore the possibility of more or less borrowing, it is too much to claim that most of the characteristic features of the Vaishṇava sects were copied from Buddhism. These features have their roots in pre-Buddhist Hindu practice, and derive from thence whatever may have been the process of development.

In one particular, however, the Chaitanya movement received from Buddhism a distinct legacy which it could well have done without. This consisted of the remnants of its monastic orders. There were in Bengal at the time a considerable number of these wandering ascetics, of both sexes, and a questionable society of low order composed of their offspring. These degraded *bhikshus* and *bhikshuṇis* of decayed Buddhism had no standing in the Hindu community, and their own moral condition was not such as to make them welcome in any orderly society. They were products of tantricism at its worst. They lived in promiscuity, and were looked upon as outcastes. Their religious origin and their utter lack of rooted social tradition made them peculiarly susceptible to absorption in a new religious movement; while to a new sect, full of propagandist zeal, this considerable body of detached and destitute religionists offered at once a temptation and an appeal. As we shall have occasion to see, the acceptance of this last gift of Buddhism entailed degrading influences that have not been surmounted to this day.

[1] For interesting evidence on this point see N. N. Vasu, *Archæological Survey of Mayurbhanj*, Intro. cxxxvi.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF CHAITANYA
FIRST PERIOD

VIŚVAMBHAR, tenth child of Jagannāth Miśra and his wife, Śachī, Vaidic Brāhmans of Navadvīp, in the Nadia district of Bengal, was born in February of the year 1486. According to popular account, his birth took place during an eclipse of a full moon, a sure omen of future greatness; as was also considered the fact (if such it be) that his birth was delayed considerably beyond the normal time. The father of the child was not a native of the famous city of Navadvīp, but had come from Dhākkādakshiṇ, in Sylhet, in order to live near the holy Ganges. The child's grandfather had migrated from Orissa to Sylhet about 1451, thus the devotion which Orissa has always paid to Chaitanya Deva, claiming him as her own, has a warrant for it.

The parents of the child, Viśvambhar, whom we shall call Chaitanya, although this name was not given him until he became a *sannyāsī*,[1] gave to the boy a devout Vaishṇava upbringing and a wealth of affection. Born the last of eight children, all of whom, save one, had been lost in infancy, he naturally became the idol of the home. The father was a Brāhman of religious disposition who had studied in a Navadvīp ṭol. He was a Vaishṇava of strict faith and pious life. No meat entered the home; for vegetarianism is a matter of religion to the devout Vaishṇava. All the food eaten in the house was first offered to Kṛishṇa and then

[1] An ascetic who has renounced all connection with the world.

taken as *prasāda*.[1] The mother, Śachī Devī, was the daughter of a well-known scholar, Nīlāmbar Chakravarti, who had also come from Sylhet to settle at Navadvīp. Thus the boy began life a privileged child, inheriting the peculiar social advantages of Brāhmanhood, but blessed far more by birth in a home whose standards were formed by traditions of scholarship and religious piety.

Boyhood and Youth

The boyhood of Chaitanya was evidently that of a very real boy. From the first there was a charm about him which made him a marked child in the neighbourhood. There is evidence of this in the names, *Gaur* and *Gaurāṅga*—he of the fair body—epithets of beauty which, given him in childhood, have continued in use to this day. The neighbours also called him Nimāi—short-lived—in pitying anticipation, doubtless, of the fate which had overtaken his baby-sisters. About the childhood of this gifted boy there has gathered a cloud of superstitious and miraculous stories, too evidently modelled upon the Purāṇic stories of the child Kṛishṇa. Amidst such a collection of puerile and supernatural exploits as make up the accounts of his early life in the accepted biographies, the real boy is well-nigh lost. We can only conjecture what basis of fact there may have been beneath the legendary.

However, we cannot be far wrong in surmising that the stories of Kṛishṇa-like pranks were not all without foundation. He was evidently a light-hearted child, full of mischief and fun, and possessed of vigour and energy that kept his mother busy.

His schooling was that of the well-born boy in such a famous centre of learning as Navadvīp. After a few years in the *pāṭhśālā*—the primary school—he entered, when only eight years of age, the Sanskrit ṭol conducted by one Gaṅgādās Paṇḍit. It is said that by the time he

[1] The food offered to the idol in a temple. It is afterward distributed among and eagerly received by the worshippers.

was ten years of age he had become proficient in Sanskrit grammar and rhetoric, and before he was fifteen was accounted one of the best scholars of Navadvīp! Doubtless, considerable allowance must be made here for the enthusiasm of sectarian loyalty. But while discounting much of the tradition that makes him out a youthful prodigy in scholarship, we must believe that he was a very intelligent boy and displayed intellectual keenness beyond the average. He seems to have confined his study largely to grammar, and the logic for which the Navadvīp ṭols had become famous.

When he was still of schoolboy age, his father died. Shortly before this the only other child, an older brother, named Viśvarūpa, had left the home at the age of sixteen and become a sannyāsī. He was never heard from thereafter. Chaitanya was now the sole hope and comfort of his mother. Soon after his father's death, when the boy was only 14 or 15 years of age, he married and became a householder.[1] According to the record, he now set up a ṭol of his own, receiving pupils in his own house. As this was evidently a common practice among paṇḍits, there is no reason to doubt the statement, although for a lad of his years the picture is rather an incongruous one. The records are also full of the dialectic exploits that now marked his life. If we are to place any reliance upon these stories, it would appear that Chaitanya delighted in disputations and established a great reputation as a formidable antagonist, entering the dialectic lists against all comers.

At this time, according to tradition, he made a fairly extensive scholastic tour in East Bengal, holding disputations and teaching from town to town. He is believed to have gone as far as Dhākkādakshiṇ, in Sylhet, his

[1] Owing to the fact of his father-in-law's name being Vallabhāchārya, it has been stated in various English works that Chaitanya was son-in-law to the founder of the Vallabhāchāryas; and, because of this fact, a relationship has been traced between the two sects. This is pure fiction, as Chaitanya's father-in-law was a Nadia householder, while the founder of the Vallabhāchāryas was not only from the Deccan, but was a contemporary of Chaitanya himself.

father's home. The fact of his having a grandfather and uncles living there makes such a visit entirely probable, but the records of the tour are very scanty. Some doubt is thrown upon these records by the fact that so little evidence of the tour is found in the history of this section. None of the points said to have been visited by Chaitanya have become famous or have been held in honour in the sect, as has been true elsewhere.

While he was absent on this tour his wife died. He was soon re-married, this time to Vishṇupriyā, the daughter of a Navadvīp paṇḍit, Sanātana Miśra. This young girl, so soon to become to all intents and purposes a widow, was destined to hold a place of considerable honour in the future sect.

The characteristics of the young paṇḍit at this time were not such as would indicate the future that was in store. The liveliness of boyhood had developed in the young man into a light-hearted, volatile temperament chiefly concerned with the things of this world. The spirit of the scholastic circles of Navadvīp possessed him, and pride of learning seemed his dominant trait. Such triumphs as Chaitanya is reputed to have scored over veteran scholars would not conduce to humility in one so young, and we infer that the quality which later so signally marked the great ascetic was not particularly in evidence in Chaitanya the paṇḍit.

The charm of the boy, however, had not been lost on reaching manhood. Chaitanya was a man of fine presence, with unusually fair skin, lustrous eyes and a mass of hair worn long over the shoulders, according to the fashion of the day. The sacrifice of this adornment, considered so striking an item of masculine beauty, was one of the things that struck the popular imagination with peculiar force at the time of his taking *sannyāsa*.[1] His personal charm, his assured social standing as a Brāhman, and his distinction as a most promising

[1] Renunciation of the world to become a wandering mendicant, the last of the four stages of life prescribed for the Brāhman.

young scholar in a University city famous for its scholars, made him a marked figure. No wonder the Vaishṇava leaders grieved that so promising a son of a Vaishṇava household should show so little interest in his father's faith. Indeed, there was little evidence, outwardly at least, to show that he had any concern for the things that had claimed his brother at so tender an age for the ascetic life.

This was not due to any lack of religious influence. As the son of pious Vaishṇava parents, he had known no other than a religious atmosphere. Direct efforts to influence him, however, were met in a half jesting, half sceptical spirit, that betokened little vital interest. It is recorded that once when a saintly Vaishṇava ascetic, named Iśvar Purī, tried to win him to a devout life, Chaitanya's only response was to pick flaws in the grammar of the Sanskrit texts quoted by the sannyāsī. This attitude may, indeed, have been partly a mask to hide an undercurrent of feeling suppressed but stirring. Advaitāchārya, the leader of the Vaishṇavas in Bengal, was a friend of the family and well known in the home. Indeed, it was at his door that the mother of Chaitanya laid the blame for the action of both her sons in becoming sannyāsīs. Evidently Jagannāth Miśra's home was open to all the wandering Vaishṇavas who passed in and out of Navadvīp, so much so that the boy's childhood and youth must have harboured many memories of venerated guests. One such ascetic, whom Chaitanya met years afterward in his travels, had a vivid memory of the devout hospitality of that Nadia home. All these influences must have made their impression on the eager young mind of the growing boy, and helped to form the sub-conscious store of latent feeling and aspiration that was to well up so abundantly when the fitting time and occasion should call it forth.

The Great Change

The great transformation in Chaitanya's life dates from a trip to Gayā, which he undertook about the year

1508, when 21 or 22 years of age, for the purpose of performing his father's *śrāddha*[1] at this celebrated shrine. Gayā had been a Buddhist sacred place for 2,000 years; it was also a Vaishṇava *tīrtha*, or holy spot, as it continues to be at the present day. Here was the famous *Vishṇupad*, the footprint of Vishṇu, which was sufficient to make it a centre of pilgrimage for the devout worshippers of Vishṇu of whatever sect. To perform the śrāddha at Gayā gave the ceremony peculiar efficacy, which accounts for the pilgrimage of a dutiful son within easy distance of the shrine.

Just what happened at Gayā to work so momentous a change in the young scholar's life it is difficult to say. The principal factor was a meeting there with the same sannyāsī who had earlier sought to influence him religiously, the Mādhva ascetic, Īśvar Purī. Doubtless the sacred surroundings and the sight of the pilgrims worshipping with simple fervour revived the stored-up memories and impressions of devotion to which we have referred, and aroused in him capacities for religious emotion which had been lying dormant in his nature. The sannyāsī now found the opportunity denied him previously, and the result of those days together was the complete turning of the young man from scholastic pursuits and desires to a life of religious devotion. Chaitanya took Īśvar Purī as his *guru*,[2] and returned from Gayā a *bhakta*, *i.e.* a man devoted in heart and life to the service of Kṛishṇa. Evidently there took place here one of those peculiar revolutions in character common to emotional temperaments in all religions, known in Christian terminology as conversion, or, more quaintly, an experience of religion. Of the reality and transforming quality of this experience in Chaitanya's life there can be no doubt. His whole after life, with its immense influence,

[1] A ceremonial offering to the spirit of the departed, a relic of ancestor worship.

[2] Religious teacher and guide, necessary for every earnest Hindu, at least of the sects. He receives initiation from the guru, and reverences him as God.

is the direct outcome of the change wrought so strangely at Gayā.

On his return to Navadvīp the change in him became the talk of the town and the very real concern of his mother. The mystic trances, which were so striking a feature of Chaitanya's emotional experience, had their beginning now. To his poor mother, already bereft of one son, they were a source of alarm and distress. She had him treated by physicians, believing him on the verge of insanity. The transformation and its causes were eagerly discussed in the daily gatherings of the Vaishṇavas. His new spirit was thus reported there:

> He is thoroughly changed; he no longer cares to comb his beautiful curling hair; his mother follows him with wistful eyes, but he talks not with her and cries, "Oh God," and sees visions of him in the clouds; he runs with his hands outstretched and eyes full of tears to catch the Unseen; despising his soft couch and white bed he sleeps on the bare earth; he no longer wears his gold chains, ear-rings and lockets, nor the fine *kṛiṣṇakeli* cloth of silk with black borders; he neither takes his bath nor does he eat his usual meals, he no longer worships gods and goddesses, nor does he recite the sacred hymns as prescribed by the *śāstras*; but weeps and cries, "Oh God, do not hide your face from me."[1]

With great hope and joy these devotees welcomed to their midst the one who was to work such wonders amongst them.

Absorption in Bhakti

There now followed a period quite distinct in Chaitanya's life, which, although brief, was of untold significance for the Vaishṇava faith in Bengal. From this time on, his whole life was centred in the Vaishṇava group in Navadvīp. Absolutely abandoning all scholastic interests and worldly concerns of every sort, he threw himself heart and soul into their life and worship. From the first he seemed to incarnate the very spirit of their devotions. The lord Kṛishṇa became the centre of all his thoughts. His energetic, expansive tempera-

[1] *C.C.*, pp. 52-53.

ment found, in the emotional worship characteristic of the Kṛishṇa-bhakti cult, just the sort of medium suited to call forth all the emotional energies of his nature. His attainments and position in Navadvīp made him a very desirable accession to the Kṛishṇa faith, and these, together with the character of his bhakti, made him the natural leader of the little community.

The chief items in the daily programme of the Vaishṇava believers were the gathering for the reading of the scriptures at various homes of the faithful, and the evenings spent in chorus-singing in praise of Kṛishṇa.

Chaitanya gave himself whole-heartedly to this musical worship, called *kīrtan*. The courtyard of a certain Śrīvāsa was the centre for the evening devotions. Here, night after night, Chaitanya found an atmosphere so highly emotionalized and a fellowship so congenial and enthusiastic as to arouse him to a high pitch of excitement. This courtyard figures very prominently in the history and hymnology of the sect in Bengal. Chaitanya himself in later days, when a sannyāsī residing at Purī, used to speak of it with affection and a trace of homesickness. Although long since swallowed up by the Bhāgīrathī river, what purports to be this famous courtyard is still the haunt of pious pilgrims at Navadvīp.

The kīrtan was chorus-singing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. The accompanying instruments played no small part in the general results attained. The *khole*, a long cylindrical-shaped drum with a peculiar detonation, and the *kartāl*, small brass cymbals, were so invariably associated with the Vaishṇava kīrtan from the beginning that they have long been looked upon as Vaishṇava symbols. The strange power of these instruments to stir the emotions of a devotee is well illustrated in the kīrtan. As it progressed, to the stimulus of song and instruments were soon added rhythmical bodily movements and hand-clapping in unison, and, as excitement increased, an abandon of dancing.

The saṅkīrtan, or chanting of hymns by Nimai and his companions, was unlike anything then known. After the instruments had been played in concert for a while, during which the singers composed and concentrated their minds, the chanting of the hymns commences. Nimai, beside himself with bhakti, rises up and begins to dance. His companions, in a moment being as it were electrified by his performance, join Nimai. Nimai dances on with uplifted arms and with eyes turned upwards, and from time to time cries out, "*Haribole*," which means, "say Hari," or simply, "*Bole bole*. . . ." The soul of the kīrtan was, of course, Nimai, whose influence awoke profound religious enthusiasm in his companions, who felt themselves immersed, as it were, in a "sea of divine bhakti." . . . Every one present was, in spite of himself, carried away by the torrent of religious excitement.[1]

Beginning in the evening, the kīrtan would increase in volume and emotional intensity as the hours passed. The fervour of excitement, induced by the group acting upon one another, mounting higher and higher, eventually produced all the excesses of hysteria and dementia. It is difficult to conceive of the energy, both physical and emotional, expended in these exercises. Men sang and shouted at the top of their voices hour after hour, dancing and jumping about in ecstatic abandon, until total exhaustion or unconsciousness brought their devotions to an end. In all this display Chaitanya proved himself past-master. Gifted with a fine voice, he never failed to touch the hearts of the devotees by his singing of the love of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa. Then, as the increased volume of song wrought upon his own emotions, he would spring to his feet, and, with arms high above his head, begin to dance in the midst of the singers. This would continue until the perspiration poured in streams from his body and the veins stood out upon his forehead. Often he would fall upon the ground in a stupor as the climax to this wild orgy, and remain thus for a long time. These were believed to be trances in which he entered into full communion with the Beloved of his devotions. Often he would be taken by something very much like an epileptic seizure,[2]

[1] *Gaurāṅga*, Vol. I, p. 124.

[2] It is interesting that Chaitanya himself, in later days, described his trances as due to epileptic fits. See, for instance, *Ch.Ch.*, II xviii, p. 326.

with frothing at the mouth and rigid body, out of which he would come with crying and tears as though torn away from a beauteous vision. Sometimes at the rendition of a touching song about Rādhā's longing he would fall to weeping, and sit or stand transfixed, shedding copious tears, lost to all sense of time or surroundings. Again, as the kīrtan rose to a climax he would break away from the circle of weeping, perspiring, dancing devotees, and dash off at top speed in a wild run, until exhaustion or a seizure brought him down. We even read of his climbing trees under the stress of excitement, and of going through all the antics of a madman, raving, and shouting the name of Kṛishṇa or Hari incessantly. The translator of the principal biography of Chaitanya, a modern historian and scholar of established reputation, speaks very truly of "the scenes of ecstasy, tireless exertion in kīrtan, madness and miracles, which form the extant history of this period of Chaitanya's life."[1]

The break with his old life which the Gayā trip had produced was complete and unconditional. From the interests of a proud young scholar, belonging to the aristocracy not only of birth but of learning, with all its sense of superiority and pride of attainment, he had suddenly turned to become a religious devotee of a cult despised by scholars, and marked in their eyes alike by its lack of social standing and the grotesque absurdity of its practices. But the break was not only one of social connection and outward attachment; it was a disruption of the very innermost habit and inclination of the mind. This is seen in the clean sweep the new bhakti enthusiasm made of all the intellectual interests of his former life. The scholarly pursuits of a paṇḍit, the atmosphere and habitudes of the ṭol life, even the zest of the disputant and the relish for the dialectic fray—all these things had passed from his life, as though they had never existed for him. Outside the Vaishṇava

[1] Sarkar, *Chaitanya's Life and Teachings*, 2nd Edn., xi-xii. This is an English translation of the middle section of the *Chaitanya Charitāmṛita*.

scriptures—principally the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and a few Bengali Vaishṇava poets—he seems to have read next to nothing after the change.

Beginnings of the Movement

The propagating spirit was strong in the new convert. The kīrtan, for instance, became in his hands something more than the fervent worship of a few devotees; his keen spirit realised its possibilities and he made of it an effective means of spreading the contagion of bhakti. The nightly sessions in the courtyard of Śrīvāsa could not but attract attention. And once within reach of the spell of such a whirlpool of emotionalism, the fate of many an onlooker was sealed. We read, for instance, of a Muhammadan tailor in Śrīvāsa's house, who could not resist the appeal of this nightly scene, and turned a Vaishṇava.

Converts multiplied rapidly, and with each new adherent the wave of enthusiastic bhakti rose higher in the community. Chaitanya's own personality was the secret of this expanding influence. His was a magnetic presence, as we shall see from his later experiences. We have already spoken of his beautiful appearance with fair skin and luxuriant hair. Gifted with a noble body and the secret of power over the minds of his fellows, he was possessed not only of emotional capacity to an extraordinary degree, but also of a nature capable of evoking in others similar emotional experiences. Such a gifted personality, suddenly devoting itself with abandon to the ecstasies of a highly emotional religion, could hardly fail to create considerable stir in a quiet community.

The kīrtan soon developed into the *nagarkīrtan*, *i.e.* the processional kīrtan.[1] Starting from the centre in the familiar courtyard, the Vaishṇavas, divided into bands with banners flying, paraded the streets of the town, chanting lustily the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa songs to

[1] Literally town-praise, *i.e.* the chorus of song and praise carried into the streets and turned into a procession.

the accompaniment of drum and cymbal. Thus the fervour and resounding appeal of the kīrtan was carried to the very doorway of every home. From being a few devout men worshipping in their own premises, the Vaishṇavas now became a public movement, and in the eyes of many a public nuisance.

The fame of the growing movement now made Navadvīp a Vaishṇava centre, to which gathered men of that faith from every quarter. The most venerable and respected figure in this community of believers was the learned Brāhman, Advaitāchārya, referred to above, whose home was in Śāntipur but who spent much of his time in Navadvīp. He came of distinguished ancestry, and was a paṇḍit of acknowledged scholarship as well as a man of very devout and pious life. As he was some fifty years Chaitanya's senior, he was now becoming an old man. We have said that he was a friend of the family, and must have known the boy Nimāi quite familiarly. But there developed now a close relationship between the old and the young man. Tradition maintains that the older man saw in the youth an incarnation of Kṛishṇa himself. Be that as it may, he clearly recognised the power of his changed young friend, and, like all others, fell under the spell of his emotional experience. When Chaitanya would lie in one of his numerous trances or swoons, Advaita was often observed to take the dust from the young man's feet, an act the latter would never permit when conscious.

One of the ascetics who was attracted to Navadvīp was a young man nine years Chaitanya's senior, who was destined to play an important rôle in the development of the sect. His name was Nityānanda. He was a Mādhva sannyāsī, who had travelled throughout India in his wanderings. He was singularly attracted to Chaitanya and the attachment was mutual. For two years preceding Chaitanya's renunciation of the world, Nityānanda lived at the home of Śrīvāsa of the courtyard, and was Chaitanya's right-hand man in all the activities of the expanding movement.

Another follower of great subsequent fame was added at this time. He was a Vaishṇava ascetic, named Haridās—orginally a Muhammadan. Of great humility and piety, he likewise, was drawn to the circle of devoted disciples by the fervent bhakti and irresistible charm of Chaitanya.

These two mendicants became the principals in a house-to-house appeal that Chaitanya now inaugurated, in addition to the kīrtan and the street processions at night. Every morning they sallied forth at Chaitanya's bidding, to sing at every doorway ; instead of receiving the traditional dole of the mendicant they were instructed to ask men to sing the name of Hari and lead holy lives. This is doubtless the origin of the custom, familiar enough in Bengal to-day, of Vaishṇava mendicants singing from door to door in the early morning hours soliciting alms. The propagating zeal did not stop with Navadvīp, but reached out to neighbouring towns and villages as well. This essentially missionary spirit, that marked the movement in its origin and throughout its best days, is one of the most striking things about it. According to some accounts, a Vaishṇava, by name Tapan Miśra, was sent to Benares by Chaitanya, to become a resident missionary of the faith in that centre of Śiva worship. This man is mentioned as the host of Chaitanya, when the latter visited Benares during his later journeys.

An interesting glimpse of another side of Chaitanya's life during this period is afforded by the record that he organised and took part in a play. This, of course, was a Kṛishṇa *yātrā*[1] portraying some portion of the familiar Brindāban stories. Chaitanya took the part of Rukmiṇī, Kṛishṇa's queen, and played the feminine part so well that his own mother, according to account, failed to recognise him. This is not to be thought of, however, as amateur dramatics after the fashion of our own day. It was all a part of the religious expression of the Vaishṇava community, and probably was

[1] A primitive sort of dramatic performance without a stage.

directly in line with the propagandist aim of their other activities.

That the one constructive achievement of Chaitanya's life—namely, the recovery of Brindāban, the home of Rādhā, and now the great Vaishṇava temple city of North India—was already conceived in his mind at this period, is clear from the fact that he now commissioned some friends to begin the task. The principal disciple chosen for this work was a schoolmate of his youthful days, who later developed into a sannyāsī of great learning and piety. He was known as Lokanātha *Gosvāmī*.[1] In obedience to Chaitanya's wish, although against his own desires, he left the glowing fellowship at Navadvīp, and started out with one companion on the arduous journey upcountry to Brindāban. There he lived his life, never again seeing the beloved form of his companion and master.

This incident is peculiarly revealing, as showing both the quality of the personal devotion Chaitanya inspired in his followers and the spirit which now animated his life. In bidding his friend and disciple goodbye, Chaitanya set the ideal of renunciation clearly before them both: "Know this, Lokanātha, that neither you nor I are meant to enjoy the pleasures of the world."

Opposition and the Final Step

In spite of the popular appeal of Chaitanya's revivalism and the success with which it swept large numbers into the Vaishṇava ranks in Navadvīp, there was still a large and influential section of the population untouched. These were the scholars and paṇḍits, the élite of the city. Indeed, the success of the movement drew them from their attitude of scorn into active opposition. Various means were employed to hinder

[1] *Gosvāmī*, literally "cow-lord," is a word whose original meaning and reference are not clear. It has come to be used as a title in the Vaishṇava sects. Among Chaitanyas it denotes an authoritative religious teacher, one who, in theory at least, is descended from one of the original disciples of Chaitanya.

the work. One of the best known incidents in the life of Chaitanya has to do with a form of this opposition. It seems that while singing and preaching in the streets of Navadvīp, Nityānanda was set upon by two young rājās of the city, who, though of noble family and great wealth, were leading wild and profligate lives. Nityānanda received a wound in the face, and was standing with blood flowing down upon his clothes, still urging the drunken men to sing the name of Hari, when Chaitanya arrived. He gently reproved the rājās, and asked why they had not attacked him instead of his beloved friend. The absence of anger and the loving spirit of the two Vaishṇava leaders deeply touched the young ruffians; for we read that, overcome with remorse, they became devout and faithful disciples of the new faith.

The *saṅkīrtan*[1] drew the particular wrath of the opposition. When it was transferred from Śrīvāsa's courtyard to the streets of the city, an appeal was made to the Muhammadan governor to suppress it as a public nuisance. He issued some sort of order against the Vaishṇavas, forbidding the uproar they were causing in the streets. In answer to this, tradition has it, Chaitanya organised a monster nagarkīrtan, and, dividing his forces into fourteen groups, paraded through the city, finally massing his singers before the Governor's residence. There the emotional influence emanating from the singing and dancing of hundreds of excited men, led by Chaitanya himself, proved too much for the Moslem magistrate. He was constrained to recognise the spiritual nature of the Vaishṇava activities, and, it is alleged, even joined the saṅkīrtan himself!

The opposition continued, however, and the scoffing Brāhman scholars yielded no converts to the despised revivalism of Chaitanya. It was the recognition, reluctantly arrived at, of the chasm which intervened between the fervent bhakti of his followers and the scornful self-satisfaction of the scholars that undoubtedly

[1] Same as kīrtan.

influenced Chaitanya to take the final step. There must have been something more, surely, some deeper spiritual reason, some imperious inner compulsion rising out of his passionate devotion, and driving him on to complete abandonment of everything but the service of Kṛishṇa.[1] But of these motives we are not told, the *Charitāmṛita* mentioning only his desire to win his fellow townsmen. Declaring his purpose to become a sannyāsī, he says,

> Then, considering me a sannyāsī, they will bow down to me, and in bowing, their guilt will be removed and I shall rouse faith in their purified hearts. Then will these godless men be saved.[2]

The desire was strong in Chaitanya's heart to convert his fellow-paṇḍits. This step was but a final expression of that zealous spirit which had created the movement. As long as he remained a man of Navadvīp, one among others, his cause could be but a party; to sever all local ties and become one of that great body of India's holy men, might give his movement an impetus that should carry it forward over all opposition. With some such expectation, and hoping that his action might be the means of finally touching the hearts and winning the allegiance of those with whom he had once been associated, he at last decided to break life's dearest ties, and, abandoning everything, to set out upon the way of the homeless wanderer.

[1] There is just a hint of something of the sort in *Ch.Bh.*, II, iii, p. 107.

[2] *Ch.Ch.*, I, xvii, p. 131. See also *Ch.Bh.*, II, xxv, p. 215; II, xxvi, p. 217, "My taking sannyāsa is for saving men." See also *Ch.M.*, II, p. 85.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE OF CHAITANYA
SECOND PERIOD

CHAITANYA'S resolve to abandon the life of a householder was carried into effect secretly at Kātwā, a village not far from Navadvīp, about the end of the year 1510, when he was 24 years of age. The sannyāsī who performed the rite of initiation was an ascetic named Keśava Bhāratī, who, like Iśvar Purī, Chaitanya's other guru, belonged to the Mādhva sect. It seems strange that, for so important a step in his life, Chaitanya should not have sought the guidance of the same teacher who had ushered him into the life of a bhakta. But forms and ceremonies were of little concern to this seeker after God, and it is quite probable that, once the decision was reached, the Vaishṇava sannyāsī nearest at hand was the best. Although by this act Keśava Bhāratī became Chaitanya's *sannyāsa-guru*,[1] we hear no more of him. Evidently he played no vital part in the spiritual experience culminating in the vow of sannyāsa, merely serving as the instrument by which that vow was consummated.

Chaitanya was now a sannyāsī of the Bhāratī order, and his new name was Kṛishṇa Chaitanya. Probably the particular order he was joining made no more difference to him than the way in which he became an ascetic. We read in the *Charitāmṛita* that, when the great scholar, Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma, met the young sannyāsī at Purī soon after this, he was disappointed that so gifted a man should have entered an order of

[1] The one who initiates a disciple into the life of a sannyāsī, as compared with the guru who gives *dīkshā*, or initiation into the sectarian faith.

sannyāsīs of lower rank, and proposed to get him admittance into a higher order. A disciple of Chaitanya's then replied that the master had little concern about the matter and was indifferent as to the relative orders.[1]

Farewell to Nadia

The effect of Chaitanya's action upon the Vaishṇava community at Navadvīp was overwhelming. So completely had he been the very life and soul of its activities, that his sudden renunciation of all he had held dear in the community came as a terrible blow, prostrating his followers. He was far more than the leader of a community of believers in Kṛishṇa; he had increasingly become the object of their devotion. Many had come to believe him an incarnation of Kṛishṇa, and were secretly paying him divine adoration. His personal charm had won the hearts of many outside the Vaishṇava community, and his passionate devotion had become an asset of the entire community. There was a sense of common bereavement, therefore, in the loss of the *Prabhū*—the master—from their midst, which was not unshared by those who had been least friendly to his movement.

This grief is found recorded in the literature of the sect. Many of the songs about Chaitanya, which soon came to be written by the hundred, dwelt upon the sorrow of his departure from Navadvīp. In the hands of a skilful singer these songs never fail to touch the hearts of a Bengali audience, as the pathos of that deserted home, the bereft wife and mother, and the stricken disciples, is made to live again after four hundred years. The following, by Vāsudeva Ghosh, one of the Chaitanya singers, are typical of these songs:[2]

> Coming to Śachī's room, Vishṇupriyā sits
> By the door. Slowly she speaks:
> "He was in the sleeping room, but at the night's end
> He fled away. I am thunder-struck."

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, vi, p. 183. Cf. *Ch.Bh.*, III, 3, p. 244.

[2] From the collection of Vāsudeva's poems in the *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Parishat*, Calcutta.

Mother Śachī, sleepless with thought of Gaurāṅga, arises
At her daughter-in-law's word, with hair dishevelled
And garments falling. Quickly lighting a lamp,
She searches everywhere—but finds no trace.

Crying "Nimāi!" Śachī calls aloud, while
Vishṇupriyā weeps, beside her in the road,
"Call! Vishṇupriyā. Call the lord of your life!
While I cry Nimāi, Nimāi!"

Loudly wail the Nadia folk hearing
Her cry. Of every passer-by she inquires.
A man advances, ten men accost him:
"Have you seen Gaurāṅga going anywhere?"

Comes the reply, "I saw him running,
Alone, on the way to Kāñchannagore."
Bāsu says, "Alas, the pity! I fear
Lest my Gaurāṅga Hari shaves his head!"

Why has he taken the daṇḍa[1] and put on
The coloured cloth? For what has he shaven his head?
Why with face like the moon does he cry,
"Rādhā, Rādhā"? Why leave his native place?
Śrīvāsa's cry would melt a stone; lifeless
Is Gadādhar's heart; like a river flow
The scalding tears from Mukunda's eyes.
From house to house Love goes, enlightening
Each bhakta, but solaced is no one.
Why has he abandoned his wife, and cast off
Her caresses, a burning fire?
How shall I speak of my sorrow—the soul's
Unutterable pain? The heart breaks
For sight of him. Separation breeds in us all
A restlessness that makes day and night alike.
Bāsu Ghosh faints.

Very soon after the ceremony at Kātwā, Chaitanya, with shaven head and wearing the saffron robe of the sannyāsī, started out for Brindāban in a state of emotional excitement. Oblivious of surroundings, as he was, it was a comparatively easy matter for his disciples, by means of a simple ruse, to deceive him as to the route and to bring him to Śāntipur, where lived the venerable Advaitāchārya.

There in the latter's home Chaitanya was prevailed upon to remain for a fortnight, holding a sort of fare-

[1] The staff of a sannyāsī.

well reception and a last glorious saṅkīrtan with his friends and followers of Nadia. On receipt of the news they quickly assembled, bringing Chaitanya's mother with them. Says the *Charitāmṛita*:

> The Āchārya, Śachī and all the bhaktas were full of joy. Every day the Āchārya made a great *mahotsava*.[1] By day there was talk with the faithful of Kṛishṇa delights; night after night they celebrated the mahotsava with saṅkīrtan. Śachī, delighted, did the cooking, and the Master with his followers feasted happily . . . Śachī's bliss increased as she gazed on her son's face. In feasting him her joy was complete.[2]

An important decision was made during these days which affected Chaitanya's whole future life. Before they separated, he yielded to his mother's entreaties, and promised to make Purī his residence. Overcome by her storm of grief at the sight of his shaven head, Chaitanya promised never to abandon her completely, and left to her decision the whole matter of his residence. It was her suggestion that he should live at Purī in Orissa, whence news of him could be brought to her by pilgrims, and where it would be possible for the faithful at Nadia to visit him now and then. By this act Chaitanya barred himself from active participation in the project nearest his heart, the reclamation of the sacred sites at Brindāban.

The old familiar joys together could not go on without end, as the faithful would have desired. Repeatedly they had persuaded him to tarry a few days longer, but now the sorrowful leave-taking was at hand. Commending the care of the Nadia Vaishṇavas to his host, Chaitanya now set out amid the general lamentations of his followers. Four disciples were detailed to accompany him, and with these he turned his face toward Purī.

Introduction to Purī

On his way through Orissa he visited several shrines sought out by pilgrims, and paid his devotions to the deities sacred in Vaishṇava legend, not omitting a

[1] Grand festival. Usually the occasion of a great feast, graced by the presence of Gosvāmīs.

[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, iii, p. 167.

Śaivite shrine or two. As they drew near to Purī the sight of the spire of the temple of Jagannāth threw Chaitanya into ecstasies.

> At sight of Jagannāth's temple he became absorbed. Prostraing himself in love, he began to dance. His followers, as though possessed, all danced and sang. With the Master, rapt in love, they went along the royal road, laughing, weeping, dancing, roaring. The six-mile journey became a thousand ![1]

When they reached the temple Chaitanya's feeling overcame him completely. He rushed forward in an attempt to embrace the image of Jagannāth, and fell in a swoon before it. The custodians of the temple were on the point of beating him to arouse him, thinking him a mad man, when they were prevented by an onlooker. This was no less a personage than a famed Vedāntist scholar and logician, Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma, who had witnessed the scene with considerable interest. He had the still unconscious body of Chaitanya carried to his own home, where some hours elapsed before he came out of the trance.

This chance meeting in the temple led to the eventual conversion of the Vedāntist to the enthusiastic religion preached by Chaitanya. Sārvabhauma, himself a Bengali of Navadvīp and the founder of the Navya Nyāya school of logic, which was its chief claim to fame, was drawn to the young sannyāsī by his beauty and the evident devotion of his life. The scholar sought first to make him a Vedāntist, and then desired, as we have already noted, to introduce him into a higher order of sannyāsīs than the one in which Chaitanya had been initiated. For seven days the great paṇḍit, who had been especially honoured by Pratāpa Rudra, the king of Orissa, instructed the young sannyāsī in the Vedānta, but without eliciting any response from him. Rather nettled by his failure to produce any impression on his hearer, Sārvabhauma pressed Chaitanya for his own opinions until the latter finally launched into an exposition of the Vaishṇava principles, so diametrically opposed to the Vedānta. The result of this discussion,

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, v, p. 180. Cf. *Ch.Bh.*, III, 2, p. 240.

according to the *Charitāmṛita*, was Sārvabhauma's complete conversion to the Kṛishṇa-bhakti cult.

The account of this striking episode as given in our authority is enhanced by sectarian and magical elements that obscure the actual facts. We are told that the scholar is finally overwhelmed by a vision of Chaitanya's deity, in which the young sannyāsī reveals himself as Vishṇu and Kṛishṇa. The record also makes Chaitanya expound pages of abstruse interpretations of the *śāstras*,[1] which is little in keeping with the one consuming passion which had marked his life since his conversion to the life of bhakti. The truth probably is that Sārvabhauma was won to a living interest in bhakti by the powerful appeal of Chaitanya's rapturous devotion and the charm of his personality. However the change may have been wrought, there is no room for doubt of the fact. The Vedāntist paṇḍit became a convert to bhakti, and took the youthful Chaitanya as his guru.

In the Sanskrit drama, *Chaitanya-Chandrodaya*, by Kavi Karṇapura, the verses are given which Śārvabhauma wrote and sent to Chaitanya declaring his new-found faith. They are quoted in the *Charitāmṛita*:

> The one, ever-ancient, Supreme Being who has taken form as Śrī Kṛishṇa Chaitanya for the purpose of teaching the knowledge of non-attachment (*vairāgya vidyā*) and his own method of devotion (*bhaktiyoga*), his shelter I seek, the ocean of mercy; may my mind like a bee cling closer and closer to his lotus-feet, Śrī Kṛishṇa Chaitanya, who is born to restore his bhaktiyoga, destroyed by time.[2]

The conversion of this veteran logician was a notable achievement for Chaitanya. Sārvabhauma was one of the most noted scholars of his time and a confirmed Vedāntist. For such a man to turn from the pursuits of a life-time and become the disciple of a mere youth is rather uncommon, even in this land of religious devotion.

[1] *Śāstra* is the name given the law-books in verse, such as the code of Manu, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*. From this it has come to mean the sacred scriptures generally.

[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, v, p. 194. Cf. also *Ch.Bh.*, III, 3, p. 246.

Sārvabhauma's confession of faith throws interesting light upon the way in which men thought of Chaitanya. We have said that in Navadvīp, among his devoted followers, even before his turning sannyāsī, the belief had established itself that he was an incarnation of Kṛishṇa. This inclination to render divine homage to Chaitanya is attributed to his followers throughout the record. Considering his arresting personality this is not strange, among the rank and file of his followers. The history of Hinduism bears witness to the ease with which the popular Indian mind tends to explain unusually gifted and forceful religious personalities in terms of incarnation. We should expect this to a certain extent. But in the case of Sārvabhauma we are dealing with a mind far above the ordinary. If in his confession we have a genuine document, and there is no reason to doubt it, it carries valuable confirmation of the powerful impression created by Chaitanya on the minds of his contemporaries, even at the beginning of his life as a sannyāsī.

The Long Pilgrimage

After several months spent in Purī, Chaitanya started southward on a journey, ostensibly to search for his brother, but really to visit the shrines of the south. The record of this tour through southern and western India consists largely of descriptions of Chaitanya's devotions at the various temples visited, and their effect upon the temple crowds. Miraculous incidents are frequently narrated, and a sectarian desire to enhance the wonder of his name is more in evidence than the effort to produce a clear and straightforward account of the pilgrimage. Many of the well-known temples of the present day appear in the record, the absence of others being due to the fact that they date from a later period. Not all of the places mentioned can be exactly identified. The record as it is given in the chief biography is confessedly not an accurate account kept during the pilgrimage, but represents the recollections of Chaitanya and his companion secured from

them by his disciples afterward. In general, however, it is possible to trace the route followed.

Leaving Purī, Chaitanya visited the shrine of the Kūrmāvatāra,[1] at Śrī-Kūrman, in the Telugu country, near Chicacole, and the temple of Narasiṁha,[2] at Jiyad, near Narasapatnam Road, 46 miles south of Waltair. At Rājamundry, on the Godāvarī river, he bathed at a spot associated with the Buddha, and had a notable encounter with a high official. This was a gifted and pious man, Rāmānanda Rāy by name, who was Governor of Rājamundry under the king of Orissa, and a devout and scholarly Vaishṇava. In him Chaitanya discovered a kindred spirit, and the two were drawn to each other by instant attraction. Sārvabhauma had whetted Chaitanya's interest by his praises of this unusual official, so that when the governor and the sannyāsī met at the bathing ghat on the river bank, a remarkable scene ensued. The narrative thus describes it :

> The Master knew at first sight that it was Rāmānanda Rāy. His mind sprang forth to meet him, but restraining himself, he remained seated. Rāmānanda Rāy, seeing the sannyāsī, came forward. Chaitanya was lustrous like a hundred suns in the saffron cloth, his body handsome and well built, his eyes like the lotus. Rāmānanda was wonder-struck as he gazed, and approaching, he prostrated himself in lowly obeisance. The Master rose and said, " Stand up and cry ' Kṛishṇa, Kṛishṇa.' " In his heart the Master was thirsting to embrace him, still he asked, " You are Rāmānanda Rāy, are you not ? " " Yes," Rāmānanda answered, " I am a low Śūdra, a slave." Then the Master clasped him tightly to him as spontaneous love arose in both alike ; in excess of feeling, Master and slave became unconscious. The two fell on the ground in each other's embrace, stupified, perspiring, weeping, trembling, with hair on end, colourless ; from the mouth of each, thickly muttered, was heard " Kṛishṇa ! "[3]

Truly here was a meeting of devotees worthy even of Chaitanya's remarkable standards of emotion !

One of the most celebrated chapters in the *Charitāmṛita* is the account of the converse between these two

[1] The Tortoise, the second of the traditional ten incarnations of Vishṇu.

[2] The Man-lion, the fourth incarnation of Vishṇu.

[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, pp. 202-3.

as they sat on the banks of the Godāvarī. The theme was bhakti—Kṛishṇabhakti—and the types, stages, qualities and passions of the love developed by the devotee in his adoration of the Lord. The peculiar tenets of the Bengal Vaishṇavas are here set forth with a theological relish and precision that suggests more of the systematic theologian than the eager dialogue between two devotees. However that be, the two men became warmly attached to each other, and found unfailing delight in each other's piety. Thus was added another to the circle of able men who came to look upon Chaitanya as their guru, and who remained faithful disciples all their lives. Among the very few works which Chaitanya had read to him daily in later years was a Sanskrit drama by this Rāmānanda Rāy.

After this refreshing experience, Chaitanya proceeded on his way. He touched at shrines near Bezwada, and others about Cuddapah, visited various sacred sites in the Arcot district, and came to Conjeeveram, where he paid his devotions at Śaivite as well as Vaishṇava shrines. Chingleput, Chidambaram, the Cauvery river, Kumbakonam, the Tanjore neighbourhood, and the Śrīraṅgam temple near Trichnopoly were all visited. At Śrīraṅgam he spent four months consorting with Śrī-Vaishṇava Brāhmans. From there he proceeded to the temple city of Madura, touching several points on the way, thence to Ramnad and the ancient shrine at Rāmeśvaram. Returning to Madura, he then sought out many sites in the Tinnevelly district and came across to Trivandrum, visiting all the sacred places in the region of the extreme south. Through Travancore and Malabar he made his way up the west coast into the present Mysore State, where he visited the famous Śriṅgerī *maṭha*[1] founded by Śaṅkarāchārya. Continuing through the Kanarese country he came to Udipi, famous as the home of Madhva, founder of the system called by his name. The image of Kṛishṇa there

[1] Monastery. The Bengali term commonly used is *ākhṛā*.

had been installed by Madhva himself. Here Chaitanya spent many days, worshipping at this shrine and discoursing with the Mādhvas over the essential Vaishṇava doctrines. Pushing on up the coast he came to Kolhapur, and then to Paṇḍharpur, the great centre of Vaishṇava devotion in the Marāṭhā country. Here he was rejoiced to meet a disciple of a guru of the same order as his own gurus, an ascetic who had been in Navadvīp and had grateful memories of the pious hospitality of Chaitanya's own parents. Going on from Paṇḍharpur, he went north beyond Bombay as far as the Narbadā river, and then turned and struck directly across central India, across what is now Hyderabad, following the Godāvarī and its tributaries until he came within the jurisdiction of the Governor of Rājamundry once more. After renewing his delightful converse with Rāmānanda Rāy for several days, he returned to Purī amid the general rejoicing of his disciples after some twenty months of wandering.

Experiences by the Way

A certain catholicity is evident in Chaitanya's pilgrim quest in keeping with his unconcern for orthodox rules of worship. He did not confine himself to Vaishṇava shrines alone, but seems to have visited all the holy places wherever he was, regardless of their sectarian connections. Such, for instance, was his visit to the Śriṅgerī maṭha of Śaṅkarāchārya, the greatest of all names associated with that *advaita*[1] philosophy which to the orthodox Vaishṇava is anathema. Even the orthodox *Charitāmṛita* mentions repeatedly his visits to Śiva shrines. It does not say more, but it is evident that to one of Chaitanya's extreme sensibility the mere sight of any object to which people were making obeisance would stir in his breast those emotions of praise which for him constituted the heart of worship.

Two Vaishṇava works, evidently new to Chaitanya, were discovered by him on this tour. He had copies

[1] Non-dualism. An absolute monism, conceiving the individual soul as identical with Brahman.

made of each and brought them back with the utmost care, carrying them, the biographer says, "like two precious jewels." These works were the *Brahma Saṁhitā* and the *Kṛishṇakarṇāmṛita*. Chaitanya spoke of these finds in superlative terms, and they were undoubtedly of great influence in the development of his thought. For this reason the account of these manuscripts is of very real interest. The *Brahma Saṁhitā* was found in Travancore. It is known in Bengal only in fragmentary form, and it is not clear from what sect it sprang. It exalts the infinite glory and forms of Govinda (one of the names given to Kṛishṇa), which would seem to mark it as Nimbārkite, but nothing definite can be said about it. The *Kṛishṇakarṇāmṛita* was written by a Travancore Brāhman, named Līlāśuka Bilvamaṅgala. Chaitanya found it at Paṇḍharpur. It is believed to be a Vishṇusvāmī work, because its teaching agrees with what little is known of Vishṇusvāmī's doctrinal point of view. The influence of these works on Chaitanya is reflected in the saying among his followers, to the effect that he founded his religion on the *Karṇāmṛita* and his theology on the *Brahma Saṁhitā*. It is significant also, that the theological work of the greatest theologians of the movement is founded upon the latter. It is clearly a mistake, however, to think that Chaitanya's religious experience is based upon either of these works, for, as we have seen, that came to flower in the days of Navadvīp, before he dreamed of being a sannyāsī or had ever heard of these writings. The sources of his religious experience are clearly the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa songs of Jayadeva, Vidyāpati and Chaṇḍī Dās. What gave these new discoveries their hold upon him was that in them he found the passionate theme of the poets treated in definite works of devotion, with a background of theological interpretation which was probably quite new to him. We may say, then, that the finding of these works probably deepened and clarified his vivid experience, and marked the beginning of a definite theological interest. Whatever system Chaitanya bequeathed to his followers

had its origin in the stimulus received from these manuscripts.

As we have indicated, the contagious effect of Chaitanya's fervent devotions in shrine after shrine is the main theme and interest of the narrative. Wherever he went, this lover of Krishṇa sought to inspire men with the same bhakti which filled his own life to overflowing. Unfortunately, the record is so exaggerated as to appear grotesque at times. Were we to take it literally, we should have to believe the whole of south India converted to emotional faith in Kṛishṇa by the mere sight and sound of Chaitanya. Here, for example, is a typical passage :

> As before, those who caught sight of him on the road, and the inhabitants of the villages he entered, all became Vaishṇavas and cried, "Kṛishṇa, Hari." These, spreading the movement to other villages, made them Vaishṇava also. There were many kinds of people in the south : some wise, some religious, innumerable godless ; these all, through the Master's influence, turned from their own creeds and became Vaishṇava. Among the Vaishṇavas, almost all were worshippers of Rāma, some being Mādhvas, and some Śrī Vaishṇavas. At sight of the *mahāprabhū*[1] these all became worshippers of Kṛishṇa and sang his name.[2]

Equally irresistible was the might of his argumentation :

> There were logicians, *mīmāṁsakas*,[3] Vedāntists, and followers of the Sāṁkhya, Pātañjali,[4] Smṛiti, Purāṇa and the Vedas. They were all bold to uphold their own scriptures, but the Master, having pointed out their defects, demolished all their opinions ; everywhere he established Vaishṇava doctrine and none could refute his conclusions. Defeated, they accepted the Master's creed, and thus he made the whole south Vaishṇava.[5]

One incident reveals (all unconsciously) a touch of broad humour. A Buddhist professor, supported by a group of disciples, undertook to vanquish Chaitanya one day. But he proved himself more than their equal, and left them no philosophic foot on which to

[1] The great master, commonly used of Chaitanya.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, ix, p. 223.
[3] Students of the Karma Mīmāṁsā, the first of the six orthodox systems of philosophy.
[4] The author of the Yoga system.
[5] *Ch.Ch.*, II, ix, p. 225.

stand. Humiliated and smarting under their defeat, the Buddhists sought by a low stratagem to accomplish what their philosophy had failed to do. They offered a plate of unclean rice to Chaitanya, representing it to be prasāda from a shrine of Vishṇu. Before he could taste it a great bird swooped down and carried off the rice, plate and all. But as he rose the plate slipped out of his talons, caught the luckless professor squarely on the skull, neatly cleaving it. The unhappy disciples now clamoured for forgiveness and succour at Chaitanya's feet, acknowledging his divinity. At his command they began to sing and shout the name Kṛishṇa in the ear of the senseless professor, whereupon he straightway rose up and joined in the shout, thus showing himself, we are to infer, a truly converted Vaishṇava.[1]

After sufficiently discounting the exaggerations and the sectarian bias of our authority, we can arrive at a reasonable surmise as to the actual facts. There is nothing in the after history of the sect to indicate any following whatever in the south. If there were any such wholesale conversion of communities it was a purely ephemeral thing, leaving nothing to show for it in later years. The truth these extravagant claims really seek to convey is that everywhere Chaitanya went crowds were deeply impressed by his evident devotion. Nowhere in the world are the common people so quick to render homage to religious sanctity as in India. Chaitanya combined with the traditional sanctity of the sannyāsī the powers of a gifted revivalist. The effect was tremendous. It is easy to believe that whole villages were stirred by the passionate intensity of his emotions, and, while under the spell, joined enthusiastically in his devotions. But this is very far from saying that these same villagers were changed from their various sectarian beliefs and practices into faithful Vaishṇavas of the Chaitanya cult.

There were definite results from Chaitanya's travels, however, that were not ephemeral. His devotion did

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, ix, p. 225.

leave a permanent impress on the Vaishṇavism of the south land. It does not seem too much to say that his personal influence effected a general stimulation of Vaishṇava sects wherever he went. In the Kanarese country, for example, we find that he is credited with helping to bring in a Vaishṇava revival, the mendicant singers who popularised Kṛishṇa worship having received their inspiration, in part at least, from him.[1]

Joys of Bhakti in Purī

During the two years of Chaitanya's absence from Purī, interest in him seems to have become quite general among the leading personages connected with the temple. This was doubtless a result of the prestige which the new type of religion gained through Sārvabhauma's conversion. Returning to Purī after his extended travels, Chaitanya met with a rapturous welcome from the little group of his disciples, and also found the leading men of Purī assembled with Sārvabhauma, eager to pay him honour.

Another distinguished citizen of Purī who was consumed with desire to see the strange young sannyāsī was no less a personage than Pratāpa Rudra, the king of Orissa himself. He was a man of devout tendencies, whose natural interests led him to honour the scholar, Sārvabhauma, and to seek a man like Rāmānanda Rāy for prime minister. Hearing of Chaitanya through these disciples, the king wished to meet him and acquaint himself at first hand with the strange

[1] Rice, *History of Kanarese Literature*, pp. 12, 59. Also Farquhar, *O.R.L.I.*, p. 303.

Another interesting piece of evidence points to definite influence in the Marāṭhā country which links the famous Tukārāma with Chaitanya. Tukārāma, who was born more than a century after Chaitanya, refers in one of his *abhaṅgs* (No. 80, p. 31, *The Poems of Tukārāma*, Vol. I, edited by J. Nelson Fraser; see also note on p. 404) to three Kṛishṇa-worshippers as his teachers. These men were Bābā Chaitanya, Keśava Chaitanya and Rāghava Chaitanya, and are referred to as followers of the Bengal saint. The fact that all three bear this name would seem to lend weight to the supposition that Chaitanya left behind him in the Marāṭhā country an influence that did not die away.

power which, in so youthful a devotee, had proved more than sufficient to master the veteran scholar and the accomplished officer of State. The king's desire, however, met an obstacle in Chaitanya himself. The ideals of the ascetic life were ever dear to him, although for its rules, oftentimes, he seemed little concerned. Since, for the true ascetic, kings were banned, Chaitanya would not consent to see Pratāpa Rudra, and it was only through a ruse that the king won his way into the presence and acknowledged discipleship of the Nadia saint.

Upon the return of Chaitanya, his disciples despatched a messenger to Navadvīp, in Bengal, bearing the joyful tidings to his mother and to the community of the faithful. In their eagerness to see Chaitanya, the Bengal Vaishṇavas now organised the first of those annual pilgrimages to Purī that came to mean so much to the disciples in Bengal. Two hundred of them came to Purī at the time of the car festival of Jagannāth, and spent a considerable period in Chaitanya's company, in delightful fellowship and daily worship in the temple. A great deal of space in the biographies is taken in describing the welcome of the Bengal pilgrims, and the various joyful events of their stay. Their vociferous entrance into the city was watched by the king from the roof of the palace. The chanting of the Bengali songs by two hundred lusty throats, together with the joyful abandon of the pilgrims as they neared the presence of Chaitanya, filled the king with amazement; nor did the sight lessen his own desire to see the object of so much devotion.

One of the exploits of these days was the cleansing of a temple by Chaitanya and the Bengal pilgrims, in preparation for the car festival. This lowly act, assuming as they did for the time being the status of sweepers, was done as an act of devotion. On the day of the great festival, when the car of Jagannāth conveys the image of the god from the main temple to another temple at some distance, Chaitanya with his followers performed great feats of saṅkīrtan. This is

the greatest day of the year at Purī, with huge crowds in attendance. The Vaishṇavas were divided into seven bands, and performed continuous kīrtan, encircling the car as it advanced. Chaitanya, in a perfect transport of emotion, went from one band to another, stimulating his followers to greater ecstasies.

With a roar the Master danced violently, whirling about in a circle like a fire-brand, till the very earth, with ocean and mountains, trembled at his tread. Stupefaction, perspiration, horripilation, tears, trembling, pallor, helplessness of all sorts, pride, exultation, humility—all these were seen. Stumbling he fell to the ground, and rolled there like a golden mountain.

In the midst of the wild dance a strange delirium came upon the Master. At the same moment all eight kinds of *sāttvik* emotion were stirred within him. His hair stood on end, with flesh and skin all bristly like a *Śimul* tree full of thorns. People were struck with fear to see such clashing of his teeth, thinking they would surely fall out. From his whole body ran sweat mixed with blood, while with choked voice he stammered incoherently. His tears fell like water from a fountain until the bystanders were wet. The beauty of his fair-complexioned body was now like saffron, now like the lustre of the *mallikā* bloom. At one moment he seemed stupified, the next he rolled on the ground; now his hands and feet were motionless like dried sticks, again he lay prone on the ground almost bereft of breath. Seeing this the disciples were weak with fear. At times water fell from eyes and nose, and froth from his mouth, just as a stream of nectar flows from the arc of the moon. . . .

As he gazed at the lotus-face of Jagannāth—its beautiful eyes sparkling in the sunlight, its garland, cloth, ornaments and perfumes—there welled up in the Master's heart an ocean of delight. A storm of frenzy seized him there, and waves of feeling arose in him in mad delight. Like to an army was the warfare of his varied emotions. . . .

All hearts and minds were attracted by the sight, and the Master's love-nectar bedewed the minds of all. All the attendants of Jagannāth, the king and his officials, pilgrims, the Purī residents, all alike were amazed at the sight of the Master's dance and love. Love to Kṛishṇa flooded the hearts of all.[1]

It is not strange that when the great car reached its destination, Chaitanya and his companions were exhausted with their exertions, and lay "overcome with love," as the biographer puts it.

After four months had elapsed Chaitanya sent the Bengal pilgrims home, expressly commissioning

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xiii, pp. 268-72.

Advaitāchārya and Nityānanda to preach the religion of bhakti in Bengal, even to the lowest castes. For three years this annual migration took place, Chaitanya's life at Purī otherwise being an uneventful round of daily worship at the temple.

The Brindāban Pilgrimage

From the very beginning of his absorption in Vaishṇavism, Chaitanya had cherished an ardent desire to see Brindāban, the holy city of Kṛishṇa-worshippers. His first thought on becoming a sannyāsī was to make this pilgrimage, but, as we have seen, the guile of his followers defeated this plan. Each year at Purī he had planned to make the journey, but was induced to postpone his departure from season to season, at the urgent entreaty of King Pratāpa and the growing company of his disciples and admirers.

Now, after the departure of his Bengali disciples after their third annual visit, two years after his return from the southern tour, Chaitanya set out for Brindāban. He left Purī accompanied by a large band of disciples, and under the escort of royal officers despatched by the king to insure his safety and comfort. At the king's command every river crossed in his kingdom was marked by a pillar set up at the ford, in order that the spot might henceforth be observed as a tīrtha, a sacred place. Special provision for the welfare of the disciples was made along the route, and quantities of prasāda were sent on from Purī to feed the whole company for several days.

In this manner he was brought into Bengal, and from there on his course was attended by crowds of his countrymen as far as a village named Rāmkelī, near Gaur, the ancient capital in north Bengal. *En route* he stopped at Śāntipur, near Navadvīp, and here rejoiced his mother by a visit. It is characteristic that he begged at her feet for permission to make the Brindāban pilgrimage. At Rāmkelī two remarkable men entered his discipleship of whom we shall hear more later. They were two brothers, Sākar Mallik and Dābir Khās

by name, high officials in the Muhammadan court at Gaur. They had been Marāṭhā Brāhmans of princely descent, whose ancestors had migrated to Bengal. These two had risen to influence and great wealth in the Moslem service, and had themselves adopted the faith of Islam. It would seem that they were spiritually unsatisfied, for, when Chaitanya reached their part of the country, they sought him out and were immediately drawn to him. They became his followers, and from that time secretly sought means of abandoning their worldly eminence for the ascetic life. Under the names Rūpa and Sanātana, given them by Chaitanya, these men were destined to play a leading part in the movement. Of this meeting Chaitanya says:[1]

> With great difficulty I came to Rāmkelī village, where two brothers came to me, Rūpa and Sanātana by name. They were kings among bhaktas, objects of Kṛishṇa's mercy, prime minister and governor by profession, of the highest proficiency in knowledge, devotion and wisdom, and yet counting themselves lowly as the grass. The sight of this humility would melt a stone. I was pleased and said to them, "Although of high station, count yourselves very lowly, ere long Kṛishṇa will release you." Speaking thus I bade them farewell, when on my going, Sanātana spoke a riddle: "Accompanied by a million men, is this the right way to go to Brindāban?"

Aroused by this frank criticism from his new disciple, Chaitanya concluded that such a popular procession from village to village, "like a travelling showman," as he himself put it, was hardly the sort of pilgrimage to be expected of a humble mendicant. He therefore gave up his plan and returned to Purī.

Upon the conclusion of the rainy season, he started out once more, but this time he stole away secretly with one Brāhman follower and sought out unfrequented ways. At Benares he stopped for ten days with two Bengali disciples, but his presence made little impression on this centre of Śiva-worship and Vedāntism. The jibe of the leading Vedāntist, to the effect that Chaitanya was only a trader in emotionalism and would find no market in Benares for his wares, seemed

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xvi, p. 306.

THE GOPĪNĀTH TEMPLE, BRINDĀBAN.

See p. 67.

THE JUGAL KIŚOR TEMPLE, BRINDĀBAN.

See p. 67.

to have stated the truth.[1] On reaching the sacred Yamunā river (the modern Jumna) he dashed headlong into it in ecstasy, and had to be rescued by his companion. This occurred repeatedly. "On the way to Mathurā, wherever he halted, he made the people dance to Kṛishṇa's loved name." At Mathurā, which is associated with Brindāban in the sacred legends of Vaishṇavism, Chaitanya visited all the holy sites and bathed at the twenty-four different ghats.

All the while, as he approached the scenes of Kṛishṇa's exploits, his emotions grew in intensity, until his companion became fearful of the result. Even the neck of a peacock was sufficient to send him into a swoon, the dark colours reminding him of Kṛishṇa. On catching sight of Govardhan hill, near Brindāban, he was so affected that he threw himself on the ground, clasping the very rocks in frenzy. Finding two shallow pools in a rice field he bathed in them rapturously, thinking them the pool where Kṛishṇa dallied with Rādhā in the water. In this manner he visited all the holy sites round about Brindāban, as far as they were discovered. At this time there was nothing of the modern Brindāban; even the sites of sacred history and legend had been lost and forgotten. However, Chaitanya's Nadia friend and disciple, Lokanātha, had been living here for some years now; and at the period of this visit other disciples were there, although the record makes no mention of their presence. During these days, Chaitanya lived in such a continuous state of emotional excitement that he was practically unaccountable for himself.

Finally, after another experience of fishing his master senseless out of the water of the Yamunā, the Brāhman companion decided that a change of scene was advisable. Chaitanya was persuaded to start for Prayāga (Allahabad), but he was so overcome at the thought of leaving Brindāban that he became unconscious and was carried away in that condition.

As they travelled along the Ganges, Chaitanya's

[1] See below p. 49.

emotions nearly cost him the lives of his followers, although, as it turned out, the final result was a group of new disciples. While resting one day in a shady spot, the sight of a herd of cows filled his mind with a flood of thoughts about the scenes of Krishṇa's exploits. Suddenly a cowherd began to play upon the flute, and Chaitanya immediately went into a swoon, foaming at the mouth and giving every appearance of being at death's door. Unfortunately, at this moment a troop of Pathāns happened upon the scene, and promptly concluded that they had found a band of robbers and their drugged victim. The hapless disciples were bound, and might have had short shrift, had Chaitanya not revived and commenced to dance joyously with uplifted hands, chanting the name of Hari. The Pathāns now realised the character of the sannyāsī, and, in great awe at his devotion, quickly released the disciples, but accused them of poisoning Chaitanya. He readily explained the situation, and then entered into a religious discussion with one of the Pathāns who was something of a holy man himself. The Moslems tried to win Chaitanya to the faith of Islam, but in the end they themselves turned Vaishṇava and became disciples of Chaitanya. They were known thereafter as the Pathān Vaishṇavas. One of them, according to the account, a young prince named Bijulī Khān, became an ascetic widely known for his sanctity.[1]

From Brindāban they came to Prayāga where Chaitanya spent several days at the *Kumbha melā*, the great bathing festival.[2] Here he was joined by one of the two new disciples from the Moslem court in Bengal, whom we have described. This man, Rūpa, had relinquished his post, rid himself of all his

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xviii, pp. 325-26. Considering the tenacity with which Moslems cling to their faith, this story on the face of it seems open to doubt. But it has had a wide currency, and evidently had some basis in fact. Dr. Sen, in his University lectures (*C.C.*, p. 282), accepts the story as it stands.

[2] This festival, of very great sanctity, is marked by a huge gathering of ascetics. It is held at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna rivers, at Allahabad, once every 12 years.

wealth except sufficient for his family's welfare, and then gone in search of Chaitanya. Another interesting visit at this point was from Vallabhāchārya, the founder of the Vaishṇava sect of that name. At Benares Rūpa's brother, Sanātana, arrived. He had been thrown into prison by the Sultan of Bengal, to prevent him from leaving his service, but had escaped and left everything for the sake of Chaitanya. On these two men, according to the record, Chaitanya spent much time, teaching them the doctrines of the bhakti cult. Six long chapters of the principal book of the *Charitāmṛita* are devoted to detailed theological exposition, which he is represented as teaching the two brothers. They were commissioned to settle at Brindāban and spend their lives as recluses, searching out the forgotten sites sacred to the Kṛishṇa faith and teaching its doctrines by word and pen.

During this stay in Benares, Chaitanya came into more successful contact with the Brāhman paṇḍits than before. The most striking result of this was the conversion to Vaishṇavism of *Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī*, the leading Vedānta scholar of the city. When Chaitanya had first come to Benares, this paṇḍit had scoffed at him in these terms :

> I have heard of a sannyāsī in the country of Gaur, a sentimentalist, one of Keśāva Bhāratī's disciples, and a deceiver. Chaitanya is his name. With his sentimental crowd he goes dancing from place to place and village to village, and all who see him in his ecstasy, call him god. His bewitching art is such that all are charmed at sight of him. The great scholar, Sārvabhauma Bhaṭṭāchārya has gone mad after Chaitanya, I hear. He is only a sannyāsī in name ; much more a great magician ! His sentimentality will not sell at Kāśī.[1] Listen to the Vedānta ; don't go to him. With that wild man is destruction in both worlds.[2]

This is the man who now surrendered to the sentimentality he had denounced. He was a recruit worthy to rank with Sārvabhauma ; and his conversion to the bhakti cult is an added commentary upon the remarkable

[1] Benares. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xvii, p. 312.

power possessed by Chaitanya to touch and move the hearts of men.

From Benares the return to Purī was made by unfrequented ways, with one attendant only.

The Last Years at Purī

Chaitanya never again left Purī. Although in commissioning his followers to settle and preach at Brindāban, he repeatedly expressed the wish that such could have been his own lot, yet it is clear that he accepted his mother's word as determining his residence for life at Purī. Having once visited the sacred sites, he gave himself to a life of worship at Purī, and left to his disciples the great work he had hoped to do himself.

The remaining seventeen or eighteen years of his life were uneventful. With a chosen few about him he settled down to the routine of life in the temple city. Each year the Bengal contingent spent several months at Purī, which served to break the monotony somewhat. But, apart from the occasional visits of scholar ascetics and disciples, the even tenor of Chaitanya's life as a recluse was unbroken. There is singularly little in the record with which to fill out the story of these last years. Small incidents, and descriptions of Chaitanya's emotions make up the narrative. He was constantly attended by a small group of disciples, who read and sang to him much of the day and superintended all the details of the daily worship, bathing, etc. As the years went on, Chaitanya became increasingly incapable of caring for himself. The extreme emotional demands made upon his nervous system for so many years could not but result in growing instability and disorder. No human organism could stand the strain put upon it by Chaitanya's experiences. Although there is no satisfactory record of the last days, what there is indicates a state of nervous disorder characterised by stupor, trances and wild outbursts of frenzied delirium, showing only too clearly the approaching utter collapse of a mind and body strained to the breaking point.

The end of the saint is unknown. His principal biographers have drawn a veil over the death of their master. Legends there are of his disappearance in temple and image, but of the fact there is no certainty.

One of the less reliable of the biographies—the *Chaitanya Maṅgala*, by Jayānanda—gives the date of his death as July, 1534, and attributes it to a wound in the foot, which brought on fever resulting in death. This may be the fact.[1] However, the common supposition that the end came by drowning in the ocean during one of his fits of ecstasy has a great deal of probability in its favour, considering the many times Chaitanya was rescued from just such a death. The body was probably buried in the temple by the priests, and the miraculous tales that arose, of the master's disappearance in various images, were doubtless created and encouraged by them for purposes of revenue.

[1] See *C.H.A.*, p. 259, for a discussion of this point. See also a discussion of the various theories in *Śrī Gaurāṅga*, by Bhudhar Chandra Ganguly, Bhāratī, p. 488. This is a useful life of Chaitanya in Bengali.

CHAPTER IV

CHAITANYA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SECT

It will be helpful at this point, before we pass on to consider the development of the sect, to gather up and enumerate those influences which made Chaitanya's distinctive contribution to the movement which bears his name. We shall not attempt to determine exactly or exhaustively the full extent of that contribution; but we can indicate at least the main lines of influence, and thus gain a clearer understanding of his relation to the sect.

The Impress of His Character and Personality

In the potent influences emanating from Chaitanya's personality we have already seen the real origin of the sect. The materials, indeed, were not of his making; they had existed for generations in Bengal in the persons of Vaishṇava adherents. But his was the spirit that took these elements of a common faith and fused them in the fire of his own burning devotion, until they came out a new creation—a living movement full of his own energy. Others took and organised what the master spirit had evolved, and gave it a form by which to perpetuate itself. But nothing in all the subsequent years of the movement has been able to efface the stamp put upon it in its origin by the personality of Chaitanya.

The marks of that initial influence are to be seen in various ways. It is clearly evident, first, in the leadership with which the movement started. We have seen how it was Chaitanya's magnetism that drew to himself

and his cause strong men who gave themselves to its faith and fortune. Such were the Brindāban Gosvāmīs, who created the theology of the sect with such outstanding power. Such were the Vedāntist scholar, Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma, Rāmānanda Rāy, the minister of state, and the powerful king, Protāpa Rudra himself, whose adherence to Chaitanya gave the movement standing throughout Orissa. Such an one was Nityānanda, sannyāsī and devotee of another sect, until he came under the master influence that fired his mind and set him at the task that has made his name a power in Bengal ever since.

The influence of Chaitanya is further seen in the fact that the greatest development of the sect followed the lines of his own deepest interests. The zealous spirit which carried it throughout Bengal and Orissa within two generations of his death was no other than the spirit which he infused into the little group of followers in Nadia. Similarly, it was his fixed idea about Brindāban and his earnestness in inspiring others with his own vision, that gave that great chapter to the history of the sect. Had it not been for his enthusiasm on the subject of the recovery of the sacred sites, it is hardly likely that Bengal Vaishṇavism would have had any connection whatsoever with the modern development of Brindāban.

The Vaishṇava character is still another fact in evidence of Chaitanya's influence. A certain type has characterised the best spirits of the sect all through the years. Its standard is the character of Chaitanya himself, whose outstanding qualities were humility, passion for God, joyousness and devotion. There are a few Sanskrit *ślokas* which are quoted in the chief biography as Chaitanya's own writing.[1] The best known of these, oft quoted by Vaishṇavas, is to this effect:

> Humbler than the grass, more patient than a tree, honouring others yet without honour oneself—such a one is ever worthy to take the name of Hari.

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, III, xx, pp. 598-600.

This bears the hall-mark of Chaitanya's spirit and may well be his own verse. The inculcation of this spirit of humility has marked the sect at all times. The common use by a large number of Vaishṇava writers of the term Dās (servant) instead of their own names, thus effectually obliterating their own individualities, is an illustration of the reality of this teaching and its practice.[1] With the other distinctive traits of the Vaishṇava character as well, it is true to say that they have been cultivated after the likeness of the character of Chaitanya.

Finally, Chaitanya's influence is manifested in the persistence of the most characteristic feature of the sect. It is precisely the same to-day as that which sprang up in that spontaneous outpouring of song in the Navadvīp courtyard under the magic touch of the young Gaurāṅga. The saṅkīrtan was the natural expression of that group. So it remains to-day the natural expression of any Vaishṇava gathering. Indeed, a gathering of Vaishṇavas without the saṅkīrtan is unthinkable. It would not be itself. The plaintive refrain, the swinging chorus, the shouting, the clangor of the familiar drum and cymbal, the swaying bodies and uplifted hands, who does not connect these things with Chaitanya Vaishṇavism as surely as the kneeling figure on the Calcutta office *jaun*[2] at sunset is associated with Muhammadanism?

The Power of His Religious Experience

The emotional fervour, which required for its expression the strenuous exertions of Chaitanya's saṅkīrtan and dance, was a new element in Vaishṇavism, at least in north India

This statement is true in spite of the fact that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has much to say about singing praises to Kṛishṇa. It is not asserted that Chaitanya created the kīrtan, for it was known long before his day. It is true to say, however, that he transformed it. None

[1] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 570. [2] Enclosed carriage with a flat top.

of the other sects based upon the *Bhāgavāta Purāṇa* developed anything comparable to the Nadia outburst. We may rightly speak of it, therefore, as a new contribution to bhakti; and its continuance in the sect after Chaitanya marked off the Bengal Vaishṇavas as possessing a distinct characteristic. The possession of emotional capacities like Chaitanya's would have marked a man in any sect, but enlisted in the service of a faith like the bhakti cult, the result could hardly fail to be extraordinary. Here lay the secret of its great appeal to the heart of the common people. Chaitanya wrought upon their feelings until the contagion of his own fervent bhakti swept them off their feet. As the Bengalis are a people in whom the emotional element is strong, this type of appeal was peculiarly fitted to evoke a popular response. It was this aroused emotional power of the group, finding vent through the kīrtan in its various forms, that became so effective a propagandist agency. Thus the very power of the movement to propagate itself lay in the immense vitality of Chaitanya's religious experience.

A further evidence of the effect of his experience is seen in the new spirit which he imparted to asceticism. He brought into it an element of joyousness that lit up the sombre and forbidding aspect that Indian asceticism usually wears. The lyric strain that was such an ineradicable element in Chaitanya's devotion, and the emotions of his heart so easily stirred to overflowing—these endowments of a generous nature could not be changed or subdued by the assumption of the yellow robe and the mendicant's bowl. To the end of the day Chaitanya remained a minstrel of Hari, with a song in his heart and the lilt of it ever upon his lips. How far this spirit was perpetuated in the ascetic order of the sect, among the *vairāgīs*,[1] it is not possible to say. But it is easy to believe that a real measure of the same spirit has characterised these men down through the years. Certainly song appears to be their chief characteristic

[1] From *vairāgya*, absence of passion.

to-day, even in their degradation, and the ever-present *ektārā*,[1] and the even cruder *gopīyantra*, simple instruments of one string, remain as humble symbols of the lyric quality that was the glory of their master's life.

Another effect of his religious experience upon the sect is a most interesting and important one. This has to do with the way in which Chaitanya's whole life soon came to be the norm by which the songs about Rādhā and Kṛishṇa were interpreted. This will be dealt with when we come to the literature of the sect. Suffice it here to say that, as the years went by, men saw with increasing clearness that Chaitanya's life was a drama of the eternal longing of the human soul for the Infinite. This was also the interpretation that came to be put upon the Brindāban legends, whereby the too-evident sensuousness of the poetry glorifying Kṛishṇa's amours was sought to be transmuted into a spiritual allegory of the divine love. So it came about quite naturally that the life of the master was used to illustrate and interpret the literature of the movement. This is the meaning of the *Gaurachandrikā*, an invocation to Chaitanya, which is invariably sung at the beginning of kīrtan. The singer sings the story of some incident in the life of Chaitanya revealing his passion for Kṛishṇa, and this provides the key for the proper understanding of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa songs which follow.

Social Consequences of His Bhakti

It is hardly accurate to write of Chaitanya in terms of social reform, or to credit him with a revolutionary social vision. Indeed, it is difficult to come at the truth in describing his influence in this respect, for his life and teaching had manifold social effects which lend plausibility to the assertions sometimes made about the social reformation wrought by him. It seems perfectly clear, however, that Chaitanya was not concerned with the reform of Hindu society. His sole interest was religion, and it is only as his religious experience, and

[1] See illustration facing p. 215.

that engendered by him among others, came into conflict with the Hindu social system that he can be called a social reformer. His social reform, so-called, was only a by-product of his bhakti.

The social consequences of his religious experience came from the catholicity of his bhakti. He recognised no limits whatever to be set to this absorbing experience, and the participation of men in it. Such breadth of view was vastly disturbing to orthodox Hinduism. That all men could find a place in common religious worship and be counted as equal in the attitude of devotion, was startling and revolutionary. Indeed, many sayings are attributed to Chaitanya which seem to transcend the caste system altogether, although the authenticity of all such teaching is not certain by any means. This attitude, on the other hand, is balanced by clear evidence of social orthodoxy. When we come to the study of this phase of Chaitanya's teaching, we shall see that he did not consistently set himself against the caste system.

It is perfectly clear, however, that he went far beyond the customs and ideas of his time in the direction of a brotherhood of bhakti. He accepted converts from Islam freely, and one of the earliest of his disciples was a Muhammadan *faqir*,[1] Haridās by name, who attained to great sanctity in the sect and was buried by Chaitanya's own hands at Purī. We have already seen how the two disciples, Rūpa and Sanātana, who were raised to the highest positions of honour as scholars of the sect, were utterly outcasted from Hindu society as renegade converts to Islam when Chaitanya met them. He repeatedly proclaimed his bhakti as being accessible to the lowest classes of Hindu society. In short, it may be said that he had courage to preach a message of religious freedom which made a place for all in its cult of loving devotion. Naturally, this gave his movement a tremendous appeal to the hearts of the common people. To this day the

[1] Ascetic, corresponding to the *sādhu* or *vairāgī* of Hinduism.

humble people of Bengal sing such songs as Dr. Sen heard among the sweepers in Tipperah, the burden of which was, "Come, and see the god-man who does not believe in caste."[1]

However, it is a question, which is the more striking, the opening of the portals of bhakti to all castes, or the sheer simplicity of the requirements of the new faith. Nothing was demanded of men but what they could give; high and low, rich and poor, without rite or ceremony, all alike were swept in on the wings of song. The one requisite was the chanting of the sacred name. It was a religious worship in which the humblest, the most ignorant, and the poorest of all could join. This simplification of religion was an achievement which had its social reverberations also, for it boded ill for the vested priestly interests. It was an emancipation of the common man from ecclesiastical tyranny, that would have been a social as well as a religious triumph could it have persisted. Temple-worship remained, of course. It was ingrained in Vaishṇavism, and occupied a very large place in the practice of Chaitanya and of his followers. But in the flowering of the movement, in the enthusiastic days in Navadvīp, the heart of it, certainly, was the saṅkīrtan. It was the essential and for the time being it seems to have been all-sufficient. These things must ever stand to Chaitanya's credit. In the midst of a priest-ridden, caste-bound society, this man, by the expansive power of his own emotional experience, was led to inaugurate a popular religious movement which for a time freed the commonalty of men from the ancient thraldom of the law book and the priest, and led them into a common fellowship of devotion.

The full consequences of this teaching form part of the history of the sect. It is probable that Chaitanya neither foresaw them nor was in full sympathy with the steps taken by some of his followers in carrying

[1] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 462. Very definite qualifications of the social freedom preached by Chaitanya require to be considered. For a fuller discussion of this social teaching see p. 118.

out the logical implications of his own teaching.[1] But it does not detract from the significance of those implications that he failed to recognise them himself. They were the elements that gave the movement its note of liberating power in its best days. Even in its later days of deterioration, this note has never entirely departed from the sect.

[1] In his latest book, *Chaitanya and His Age*, Dr. Sen argues eloquently for the view that Chaitanya himself was the guiding spirit in all the social measures undertaken by Nityānanda in Bengal. 'Nityānanda was appointed by him to stay in Bengal with the sole charge of social reformation; Chaitanya had found the caste system eating into the vitals of our social fabric, and he and his followers were determined to root out the evil from the land" (pp. 278-79). "Thus we see that he was behind the great machinery of social reformation set on foot, guided and controlled by him at every stage of the advancement of the cause of Vaishṇavism in this great province" (p. 287). With the utmost admiration for Dr. Sen's great learning, and deep feeling for Chaitanya, I am persuaded that this is a misreading of the story, and that the view set forth in the text comes nearer to the truth. Evidence for this point of view will be given in succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER V

THE HISTORY OF THE SECT

The foregoing chapters have made clear Chaitanya's relation to the sect. Although he did not seek to build up a cult around his own person, yet he was manifestly responsible for the initial steps in the spread of the clearly marked type of Vaishṇavism which had gathered about himself as its expounder and exemplar. It has been thought by some that Chaitanya was merely an instrument in the hands of his leading disciples, and that the development of the movement was entirely due to them. The contemporary records certainly do not bear out the first part of this theory. Whatever may be the truth as to later developments, Chaitanya unmistakeably set his impress upon the origin of the movement. In its main lines and characteristics it was the creation of his own life and thought. The initiation of the Brindāban settlement, the conversion of the men who were to be the theologians of the sect, the institution of the saṅkīrtan, the commissioning of Nityānanda as chief agent of the movement—all these facts from his life show how clearly the origin of the movement was the result of his own experience and purpose.

Having said this much, however, we have said about all that can be said. Beyond the influence of his name and personality, Chaitanya had nothing to do with the development of the sect. There is no evidence that he concerned himself with active propaganda, at least in the later years of his life, and as for organising his followers, it is clear that he had no concern with such things.

The Influence of Nityānanda

How far there was any definite organisation of his followers it is difficult to say. Tradition ascribes to his leading disciple, Nityānanda, more than to anyone else, whatever there was of this activity. The institution of the ascetic order of vairāgīs, under the banner of Chaitanya, is popularly accredited to him. It is certain that such mendicant followers did develop in subsequent years in considerable numbers. It was Nityānanda's son, Vīrabhadra, who definitely admitted within the fold of Vaishṇavism the degraded remnants of the Buddhist mendicant orders, both male and female. This would tend to confirm the tradition concerning Nityānanda's leadership in the early organisation of the sect.

There seem to have been some coolness between Nityānanda and Chaitanya toward the end of the latter's life. During the last six years there is no record of a meeting between the two. There was no open rupture, but the intimacy of the early years is lacking. At the end of the *Charitāmṛita* a mysterious message from Advaita to Chaitanya is recorded, which scholars interpret as referring to some sort of divergent action on the part of Nityānanda. This action was doubtless the revolutionary social step which Nityānanda took in enrolling as Vaishṇavas and disciples of his the Subarṇa Baṇiks,[1] the goldsmith caste, wealthy indeed, but low in the social order. This definite application on such a large scale of the principle undoubtedly implied in Chaitanya's teaching, may have been too much for Chaitanya's inherited regard for the Hindu social system. Chaitanya had preached equality in worship, indeed, and proclaimed that bhakti transcended all caste distinctions, but it is unlikely that he was prepared for a wholesale defiance of the accepted order.[2] Nityānanda's

[1] Sansk., *Suvarṇa-Vaṇika*. This action is also referred to in the *Ch.Bh.*, III, v, p. 280.

[2] Here we are faced with conflicting testimony on the part of the chief biographies. The *Chaitanya Bhāgavata* maintains that Nityānanda saw Chaitanya after this action, and was highly praised by him in these words: "According to your own sweet will you have in you

more vigorous temperament led him into a revolutionary step that was as logical as it was intensely distasteful to Hindu society. Such a flouting of Hindu custom could meet with but one fate—the united and vigorous protest of orthodox Hinduism. Nityānanda's renunciation of his ascetic vows, and his marriage late in life, had already set an indelible stain upon his Brāhmanhood. His leadership in this further defiance of Hindu law and order resulted in his being outcasted.

Thus it was that the vigorous application of Chaitanya's principles was associated with the name of Nityānanda. The very boldness of the action, and the following it created, served to give Nityānanda a primacy in the movement, which has descended as a heritage to this day among the Gosvāmīs who claim descent from him. Once admittance into Vaishṇavism had been gained by one large section of the low-caste population, the way was prepared for other similar elements to press for entrance.

Here at the very beginning, during Chaitanya's lifetime, a division arose in the sect which has been lasting. Nityānanda's action in admitting the lower elements of society to discipleship did not meet with the approval of Advaita, the veteran scholar of Śāntipur, who, together with Nityānanda, had been commissioned by Chaitanya to care for his followers in Bengal. He held himself aloof from participation in it, and evidently did not believe in any such revolutionary practice of the ideas proclaimed by Chaitanya. His descendants continued to maintain this conservative attitude, while Nityānanda's descendants, on the other hand, have continued to accept the discipleship even of disreputable elements in the social order.

different kinds of bhakti; all people who are depressed, fallen, and of low caste have been freed because of you. The bhakti which you have given to the Baṇiks is desired even by gods, by the perfect, the *munis* and *jogīs*" (III, viii, p. 292). It must be remembered that this biography shows much partiality to Nityānanda, and is inclined to be more concerned with his history, toward the end, than with that of its subject.

There was no other single leader among the immediate followers of Chaitanya who wielded an influence in any way comparable to that of Nityānanda. Advaita, while a Brāhman and a highly-respected scholar, was not in a position to lead a popular movement. He was very old, and evidently did not carry his own sons with him in devotion to the Vaishṇavism of Chaitanya. It is recorded that he disowned all his sons save one, because of their lukewarmness in the faith. This one disciple died without issue. Thus the second chief branch of the Gosvāmīs of Bengal are all descendants of the unbelieving sons of Advaita. Manifestly they were not likely to create a very enthusiastic following in the early days of the sect, before it had attained to fame and power. Of the other immediate associates of Chaitanya, each had his own following and developed a considerable body of disciples, but there is little evidence of their exerting a decisive influence upon the character of the movement. Of course, the six scholars at Brindāban were honoured as the fathers and theologians of the movement, creating its authoritative books, and acting as censors of all that affected its thought and welfare. But they were far away from Bengal, and necessarily removed, as ascetics and recluses, from the ordinary life of the lay disciples of Chaitanya.

Thus the field was left clear for Nityānanda, and his became the dominating influence in the development of the sect. He, in fact, became its real head. Practically all Gosvāmī families of Bengal owe some sort of allegiance to him. Indeed, one may say of the sect as a whole, that, as far as Bengal is concerned, it owed its existence very largely to Nityānanda and his descendants.

How the Movement Grew

The growth of the movement in this first generation was not an organised expansion in any sense. It was rather the spreading out of various unco-ordinated groups or communities, each one gathering about the

person of a disciple of Chaitanya who had caught something of the power of his master's contagious bhakti and was intent upon spreading it. The successive pilgrimages to Purī kept up the fire in the hearts of a large body of Chaitanya's followers, and thus the enthusiasm was maintained.

In a book called *Vaṁśīśikshā*, which is largely descriptive of the life of a Brāhman friend and disciple of Chaitanya named Vaṁśīvadan, or Vaṁśīdās, we get an illustration of the process of the sect's growth. This disciple, to whose care Chaitanya had committed his mother and sister, migrated from Navadvīp after Chaitanya's death, and established himself at a place called Bāghnāpāṛa. Here he set up a temple and gathered about him a considerable Vaishṇava community. His sons and grandsons followed in his steps, increased their following, and thus established the line of Bāghnāpāṛa Gosvāmīs. In a similar way each well-known disciple of Chaitanya, recognised as a Gosvāmī, or guru, of the sect, because of his relation to Chaitanya, established himself at some centre and built up a larger or smaller following of disciples in the surrounding country.

Nityānanda settled at Kardaha, a few miles north of Calcutta, and made of this place a famous Vaishṇava centre. He gathered about himself a group of disciples who took an active part in the propagation of the faith. Twelve of these men are familiarly known in the literature of the sect as the twelve Gopāls. They are associated with Nityānanda in the adoration of devout worshippers to-day. They were especially noted as singing evangelists.

Just when the cult of the worship of Chaitanya was introduced it is difficult to say. Long before his death many had come to believe in him as an incarnation, but the actual worship of his image was hardly to be found during his lifetime. King Protāpa Rudra, of Orissa, had a life-sized image of Chaitanya made some time before his death, and the image preserved in the Chaitanya temple at Kālnā, in the Nadia district, was

set up about the time of Chaitanya's departure from Navadvīp. But it is not likely that such worship gained much headway until after his death. In the *Vaṁśīśikshā*[1] it is recorded that Vaṁśīdās became convinced, by means of a vision, that he should spread abroad the worship of Chaitanya's image. He therefore made an image out of the wood of the tree under which Chaitanya was born, especially for the benefit of Vishṇupriyā, the stricken wife of Chaitanya. This image, or something of it incorporated in a new one, is still preserved at Navadvīp in great sanctity.

Another friend and follower of Chaitanya, named Narahari Sarkār, who wrote the first songs about him in the vernacular, is said to have been the first to preach the worship of Chaitanya. "He prepared the code and the *mantra* for the worship of Chaitanya, and these were accepted by other Vaishṇavas in Bengal a short time after."[2]

Development at Brindāban

Before we trace the development of the sect in the century after Chaitanya's death, we should pause here to describe the remarkable activity that took place at Brindāban. It forms a chapter by itself in the history of Bengal Vaishṇavism and is all the more striking because of its being so far removed from the home of the sect.

As we have seen, this development at Brindāban was the direct result of Chaitanya's own action. To all Vaishṇavas, Mathurā (modern Muttra) and Brindāban are holy sites because of their connection with the legends of Kṛishṇa. To a devotee of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa the scenes of Kṛishṇa's līlās at Brindāban must ever be of supreme sanctity. Thus it is easy to understand the charm that the groves of Brindāban possessed for the Vaishṇavas of Bengal. But aside from this common attraction exercised on all bhaktas, Chaitanya inherited through his gurus a more direct interest in the sacred country. As we have

[1] Edited by Dr. B. K. Sāstrī, IV, p. 188. [2] *C.C.*, p. 102.

already pointed out, both his dīkshā and sannyāsa gurus were disciples of the great Mādhavendra Purī, who, fifty years before, had turned the thoughts of Bengal Vaishṇavas toward the sacred sites of Brindāban. He had even established a small temple there and installed two Bengali priests as its custodians.

Thus in undertaking the restoration of the holy sites Chaitanya was following a path already marked out in part. However, to him belongs the credit of conceiving the enterprise on a far larger scale, and inspiring a band of able men with a spirit equal to its completion. We may count this the one constructive purpose of Chaitanya's life. Although he was unable personally to work at the task, we must admire the immense enthusiasm which could bring under its thrall men of great capacity and set them to such a life-long task of pioneering, laborious scholarship, and austerity.

By far the greatest names among the Chaitanyas connected with Brindāban are those of the two brothers, Rūpa and Sanātana, whose story we have already noted. The vast learning of these scholars and their contribution to the literature of the sect will be dealt with elsewhere. Their powers of mind and their prolonged studies in Sanskrit lore, combined with the austerity of their lives as saintly recluses, gave them a commanding position in the religious community centred in Brindāban. With them were associated their nephew, Jīva Gosvāmī, whose name and attainments are held in almost equal veneration with their own, and three others, namely, Gopāl Bhaṭṭa, Raghunātha Dās, and Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa. These six scholars and devotees occupied a unique place in the development of the sect. They were the six Gosvāmīs, the authoritative teachers and exponents of its doctrines, and as such have been held in highest veneration ever since.

To these men is due in large measure not only the reclamation of the sacred sites, but the popularising of Brindāban as one of the chief religious centres in north India. In his well-known work, *Mathurā*, Growse says that until the end of the sixteenth century the whole

THE GOVINDJĪ TEMPLE, BRINDĀBAN.

THE MADAN MOHAN TEMPLE, BRINDĀBAN.

country was practically woodland. "The Vaishṇava culture then first developed into its present form under the influence of the celebrated Bengali *Gosāins* of Brindāban. . . . From them it was that every lake and grove in the circuit of Braj received a distinctive name, in addition to the some seven or eight spots which alone are mentioned in the earlier Purāṇas."[1] Again he says, "This last named community (the Bengali Vaishṇavas) has had a more marked influence on Brindāban than any of the rival schools, as the foundation of all the material prosperity and religious exclusiveness by which the place is now pre-eminently characterised, was laid by Chaitanya's immediate disciples."[2]

Rūpa and Sanātana were the authors, probably, of the *Mathurā Mahātmya*, a work descriptive of all the sacred shrines and now forming a part of the *Varāha Purāṇa*.

It was under the influence of these leading Gosvāmīs that the great temples of Brindāban were built. The finest of them all, the Govindjī temple, bears record in a Sanskrit inscription that it was built in A.D. 1590, under the direction of the two gurus, Rūpa and Sanātana. This temple, Growse says, "is the most impressive religious edifice that Hindu art has ever produced, at least in Upper India."[3] In addition to the image of Kṛishṇa in this temple, there are small images of Chaitanya and Nityānanda. The other three that make up the oldest series of temples are known as Gopīnāth, Jugal Kiśor and Madan Mohan. These four temples were undertaken to commemorate a visit from the Emperor Akbar, who came to Brindāban drawn by the fame of these Gosvāmīs. The funds were provided by the neighbouring rājās and wealthy disciples. The names of others of the six Gosvāmīs are associated with the building of temples, seven of the oldest being ascribed to their influence. One of these, the Rādhā Dāmodar temple, deserves

[1] p. 50, Ed. 1874. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 121. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 123.

mention, because the remains of Jīva Gosvāmī, its founder, and also those of Rūpa and Sanātana lie buried there.

When we consider the place of Brindāban in the religious life of India to-day, with its more than 1,000 temples, its 32 ghats, and its ceaseless stream of pilgrims, it is no small achievement to be laid to the credit of Chaitanya and his followers that their devotion should have laid its foundations. As Dr. Sen says, "How this happened is a tale worth telling to Bengali students, for . . . this was done by the influence of Chaitanya and some of his colleagues, although they were but ascetics and beggars and had nothing themselves to contribute to the material development of the place."[1]

The six Gosvāmīs spent the greater part of their lives at Brindāban. Around them gathered other scholars from Bengal, and at their feet young devotees came to study. Thus it naturally came about that this Brindāban coterie of scholars became the intellectual centre of the sect. Here were created its theological works, its philosophy and its ritual. From Brindāban the works of these masters were sent to be preached and taught in Bengal. The standard life of Chaitanya, the *Charitāmṛita*, was written here and then sent to Bengal. The biography next in Vaishṇava favour, although written in Bengal, was sent to Brindāban to be read and approved. In this way the approval of the Brindāban scholars was set up as the standard of orthodoxy. As long as the Gosvāmīs lived, and they lived on to the end of the sixteenth century, this remarkable primacy of Brindāban in the Bengal movement continued. How much longer it survived in such a definite way it is difficult to say. We read of a conference of Chaitanya scholars held in Jaipur at the beginning of the eighteenth century, composed largely of Brindāban Vaishṇavas, when an official commentary on the *Vedānta Sūtras* was decided

[1] *V.L.*, p. 18.

upon. This would indicate the continued supremacy of Brindāban at that date.

The Generation Following Chaitanya

The generation immediately following Chaitanya's death was in some ways a time of reaction. Chaitanya's going was a blow that stunned his followers, and left them incapable of the emotional exercises that marked the sect. "The saṅkīrtan parties lost all heart, and their great music, which had taken the country by surprise and flooded it with poetry, broke in the midst of their enthusiastic performances and sounded no more on the banks of the Ganges."[1]

However, the stream of literature which later rose to such volume and power had its origin at this time. Many songs were written during this first generation after Chaitanya, and the earliest of the biographical notes on his life were put together then.

The most important feature of this period, however, is the way in which the sect continued to absorb the outcaste elements of the social order. Nityānanda's work in this respect was carried on by his son, Vīrabhadra, or Vīrachandra, as it is also given. This man was evidently a leader of great influence in the growing community, not only because of his being the son of the great Nityānanda, but also because of the position he held in his own right as the innovator of measures of supreme importance for the future of the sect.

We have noted that for some time before the death of Chaitanya there was more or less of a division in the sect, Nityānanda being the leader of the party which was chiefly concerned with extending the sway of Vaishṇavism among the masses of the population, regardless of caste rule and prejudices. Vīrabhadra evidently continued in his father's footsteps until there was danger of a split. He was even threatened with excommunication by the Gosvāmīs of Brindāban, after which the differences were patched up after a fashion.

[1] *V.L.*, p. 68.

In the *Bhaktiratnākara*, a historical work written in the early part of the eighteenth century, there is mentioned a letter from the six Gosvāmīs of Brindāban, expressing their pleasure over the return of Vīrabhadra to the fold.

The most important development connected with his name has to do with the admittance into Vaishṇavism of the *Neṛā-Neṛīs*, *i.e.* the shaven. These were members of the Buddhist mendicant orders, left stranded, as it were, in Bengal in the wake of their defunct religion. They were a sadly degraded community, living in promiscuity, and utterly outcaste in the midst of the Hindu social order. These bhikshus and bhikshuṇīs[1] of a decayed Buddhism were doubtless attracted to the faith preached by Chaitanya and his followers because of its likeness in many ways to the faith which had been theirs. But not even Nityānanda, so far as we know, ventured to throw open the gates of the sect to them.

It was reserved for Vīrabhadra to take this step. Under what circumstances, or with just what purpose, we cannot say. But the fact is definitely stated, and referred to in more than one book, that 1,200 bhikshus and 1,300 bhikshuṇīs were admitted into the fold of Vaishṇavism by Vīrabhadra at Kardaha. In commemoration of the event, an annual *melā* was held at Kardaha until recent years. It is doubtful how much of an effort, if any, was made to reform these new disciples and improve their moral standards. At least, marriage was instituted among them, to give some semblance of propriety to the promiscuous relations that prevailed.

Just what relation, if any, these Buddhist mendicants bore to the ascetic order of vairāgis and *vairāgiṇīs* which grew up in the sect is not at all clear. It would seem as though this might be the beginning of mendicancy in the sect, and such a guess is strengthened by the fact that both these groups trace back their origins in the sect either to Nityānanda or his son. But the facts do not bear out this supposition very well. Chaitanyas

[1] Beggars, male and female. They were the monks and nuns of Buddhism.

have never recognized the Neṛā-Neṛīs as an integral part of the sect, and to this day they are not classed among the ordinary vairāgīs of the sect, although there can be little difference between them now. They still persist as a separate class, in name at least.

We cannot say for what purpose they were admitted. In the eyes of many of the leaders it must have been an unpopular step. It is probable that Vīrabhadra saw, in this forlorn and degraded class, the opportunity of creating a propagandist body who could spread the doctrines of the sect effectively among the lowest ranks of society. Historically, this episode presents very clear evidence of the influence of the widespread tantricism of the day upon the new movement. These Buddhist remnants represented a blend of tantricism and Buddhism at its worst, and their admission into the Chaitanya movement seems to indicate a tāntric leaning on the part of Nityānanda and his son. It is of interest to remember, in this connection, that tāntric symbols are to be found in one of the temples of Kardaha built by Nityānanda and Vīrabhadra.

Somewhere in this period is to be placed the beginnings of the medicant order mentioned above. How it began, by whom, and when, are all wrapped in obscurity. Tradition couples the name of Nityānanda with the initiation of the simple form of *bhek*,[1] by which it is known. There was nothing new in this development. It meant simply that the new movement was following the course of its elder sister sects in Vaishṇavism. That it arose quite apart from the Neṛā-Neṛī invasion is the likeliest supposition.

Seventeenth Century Revival

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, when all those who had been principals in the movement

[1] Probably derived from *bhikshu*, although Vaishṇavas explain it as from the Bengali word *beś*, meaning dress. *Bhek* is used of initiation into the ascetic life of the Bengal Vaishṇavas, which is a life without much rule or discipline as compared with that of the Śaṅkara sannyāsīs

had long since passed away, the sect entered into a period of great interest. Here, as elsewhere, the history of the period is largely a record of outstanding personalities who became dynamic centres of influence. There were three such personalities whose character and power made them worthy successors of the first great leaders. These men were Śrīnivāsa Āchārya, Narottama Datta and Śyāmānanda Dās. Much of the literature of the period is concerned with these men, and their activities in the spread of the Vaishṇava faith. They had all studied under some of the immediate disciples of Chaitanya and had spent a number of years at Brindāban, undergoing the highly intellectual as well as ascetic discipline of the Gosvāmī circle there. They had grown up in the period succeeding Chaitanya's death, when the cult of his deity had become fixed and veneration for his character had deepened with the years. They were both scholars and saints, learned in the intricacies of Vaishṇava theology and saintly in life, with that peculiar combination of ascetic and revivalist, which has been the predominant trait of Vaishṇava sainthood in Bengal since Chaitanya's time. A considerable literature grew up dealing with the travels, the triumphs, and the sanctity of these men.

Śrīnivāsa came into prominence through his conversion of a famous rājā, named Vīra Hāmvīra, who was a notorious robber. This man became a vigorous Vaishṇava, and used his wealth and influence in the propagation of the faith. He was the ruler of the independent State of Vishṇupur, which embraced a considerable portion of what is now the district of Bankura and more besides. His was one of the oldest ruling houses of Bengal, known as the Malla Rājās ; they were in power before the Muslim rule. At this time it was a powerful State, and became a noted centre of Vaishṇavism. Numerous temples were built and endowed by this rājā and his successors. They are of some importance architecturally, because of their beautiful brick carving and because they represent the most complete set of

specimens of the distinctively Bengal style of temple architecture to be found to-day.[1]

The second of the trio, Narottama Datta, was the son and heir of Kṛishṇānanda Datta, a wealthy rājā of Kheturi, of the present Rajshahi district. The establishment maintained by this family was on the scale of a small court, and the boy grew up as something of a prince. His inclinations were not in harmony with this kind of life, and he ran away at an early age to Brindāban, where he dedicated himself to the life of the vairāgī. He became an ascetic of great fame and sanctity, attracting many disciples, among whom were numerous Brāhmans. As he was a Kāyastha by caste, this infringement of caste principles aroused much opposition. Among his converts there figures a rājā of the present house of Pāikpāṛa, near Calcutta. Narottama founded a Chaitanya temple at Kheturi, and wielded great influence among high and low. Kheturi became one of the active centres of the faith. A great festival was held here in the second decade of the century, to to which every Vaishṇava in Bengal was invited. It was carried out on a lavish scale, and, judging from the references to it in the literature, it must have been a notable incident in the development of the sect. From Kheturi Narottama's disciples "in their proselytizing zeal went up to the eastern borders of Bengal, to Tipperah and Manipur, where the ruling chiefs now accepted the Chaitanya cult." Others "spread the tenets of Vaishṇavism in the Dacca district—and other places where the Vaishṇavas showed great activity in preaching their propaganda."[2] The temple at Kheturi is of interest because of its image of Vishṇupriyā, the wife of Chaitanya, associated with those of Chaitanya and Nityānanda. An annual melā is held here in October.

Śyāmānanda and the Winning of Orissa

The third figure of the group, Śyāmānanda Dās, brings us to the expansion of the sect in Orissa.

[1] *Report, Arch. Survey of India*, 1903-4, p. 50. [2] *V.L.*, p. 163.

Śyāmānanda was a man of low caste belonging to Orissa, but, in spite of that fact, he was accepted by a Chaitanya guru in Bengal as his disciple. Later he studied for some years at Brindāban under the great Jīva Gosvāmī, the last of the six Gosvāmīs whom Chaitanya had settled at Brindāban. After finishing his training under Jīva Gosvāmī, Śyāmānanda returned to his native place in Orissa, and soon established a following there by the reality of his devotion and the quality of his scholarship.

Naturally, Orissa was prepared soil for Vaishṇavism. The influence of Chaitanya's life at Purī had been enormous. The power of his own ecstatic devotion, the annual migrations of his followers from Bengal, and the emotional appeal of his whole experience had made his name and faith widely known throughout Orissa. This had not died out nor been forgotten entirely during the succeeding decades. So when Śyāmānanda began to proclaim the religion of Chaitanya bhakti, he found conditions ripe for its acceptance. Many among the men of influence and leading became his disciples, in spite of his low caste. His chief disciple was a young rājā, named Rasika Murāri, who had come into control of an extensive estate. This young nobleman became a zealous herald of the faith, and succeeded in carrying it into the backwoods districts as well as into the palaces of the aristocracy. The Mahārājā of Mayurbhanj, and the chiefs of various other feudatory states in Orissa, still acknowledge the descendants of Rasika Murāri as their hereditary gurus.

The ancestor of the present house of Mayurbhanj with his brothers was converted to Vaishṇavism in 1575. He built several substantial temples of brick and stone, superior to most temples found in Bengal. Their ruins still stand.[1]

The work of these pioneer preachers was ably carried on and popularised by a group of poets, known as the six Dāses. Their names were Achyutānanda,

[1] *A.S.M.*, p. 11.

Balarāma, Jagannātha, Ananta, Yaśovanta and Chaitanya. The principal Chaitanya literature of Orissa was created by them, and their poems and songs made them household names throughout the province.

The outcome was that Orissa became such a stronghold of the Chaitanya faith that to-day the name of Gaurāṅga is more commonly reverenced and worshipped among the masses than in Bengal itself.

Vaishṇavism in Assam

Another section in which the Chaitanya movement made itself felt was in Assam. While the development there was in no sense as direct a propagation of the sect as in Orissa, still it may be said that the growth of Vaishṇavism there had more or less connection with the spread of the Chaitanya movement.

The prevalent religion in Assam up to Chaitanya's time was the Śākta cult. It was the religion almost entirely of the rājās and the aristocracy. Vaishṇavism spread as a democratic faith. The apostle of this religion in Assam was a contemporary of Chaitanya's, by the name of Śaṅkara Deva.

He travelled through India on a pilgrimage, and was evidently drawn to the Vaishṇava faith at this time. Tradition states that he was a student for some time under Advaita at Śāntipur; it is also said that at one time he and his leading disciple visited Chaitanya at Purī. While these things are insufficient to establish a direct relation between him and Chaitanya, yet it is altogether likely that the inspiration behind his advocacy of Vaishṇavism was due to the Chaitanya revival in Bengal. He is spoken of as belonging to the Chaitanya school. His chief doctrines were characteristic of the Chaitanya sect, such as the adoration of Vishṇu above all others, the exaltation of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the efficacy and sufficiency of *nāma-kīrtan*, *i.e.* the recitation of the name of God, and the use of saṅkīrtan as true worship.

The two main divisions of the sect, which spring from Śaṅkara Deva, are called Mahāpurushya and

Bāmunya. Although there are minor offshoots, these continue to represent the main stream of the Vaishṇavism of Assam. Buddhist influence is evident in the character of the maṭhas, called *sattras*; for they have far more of a monastic rule than is found in any of the ākhṛās of the Bengal Vaishṇavas. These maṭhas are extensively developed on the island of Majula, in the Upper Brahmaputra river, the headquarters of one branch of the sect containing no less than 188, the larger ones accommodating as many as 300 ascetics. No women are allowed here—certainly a great advance over the ākhṛās found in so many villages of Bengal. One cannot but wonder whether there is not a significant relation between this higher morality of the Assamese maṭhas and the fact that the founder, Śaṅkara Deva, did not preach the fifth stage of the Chaitanya bhakti, which uses the imagery of love between man and woman to symbolize the highest devotion. The Bāmunya division of these Assam Vaishṇavas names Chaitanya among the traditional teachers of the sect, but there is to-day no connection of any kind with the Bengal Vaishṇavas. Indeed, the sect as a whole is remarkably provincial, some of its *mahantas*[1] and Gosāins[2] being largely ignorant not only of Vaishṇavism elsewhere, but also of the fundamental philosophy of their own faith. However, it does not seem too much to claim that the Vaishṇavism of Assam, numbering some one million three hundred thousand adherents, and occupying a place of importance in the religious life of the province, is an indirect but real result of the Chaitanya movement.

Two Centuries of Decline

After the vigorous expansion of the seventeenth century, the fortunes of the sect seem to have gone under a cloud that lasted for nearly two hundred years. The historical works produced as a part of the great literary output of the sect were largely confined to the seventeenth century. The last of these works, the

[1] Head of a maṭha or ākhṛā. [2] Colloquial corruption of Gosvāmī.

Bhaktiratnākara, was written within the first few decades of the eighteenth century. After it we have nothing of importance. The sect seems to have burnt itself out and to have sunk gradually into a lethargic state, with neither leaders nor spirit worthy of its tradition.

It was a period of a great Śākta revival over Bengal, followed by decadence generally in Hindu society. For Vaishṇavism these two centuries were the dark ages. Even members of prominent Gosvāmī families renounced their sectarian faith and wandered off into corrupt cults, which spread their rank growth everywhere. No longer appealing to the better elements in the community, its increment was restricted to the lowest sections of the social order, the ignorant, the vicious and the morally outcast. Bereft of the spiritual fervour and religious vitality that had given reality to its social appeal, it lost most of its distinctiveness as a reforming influence. The usages of Hindu society re-established themselves within the sect, until the Gosvāmīs and the householders were as much subject to caste rules as the orthodox society itself. Those Gosvāmīs of lower castes who had Brāhman disciples, of whom there were considerable numbers in the early days, decreased in number and influence until to-day scarcely any such can be found. Even among the vairāgīs of the sect caste distinctions re-established themselves to a certain extent. "Thus," says the historian of Bengali literature, "do we find Hindu society to be almost proof against any attempt to break down the Brahmanical caste system. Hindu society has often been seen to yield for a time to the inspired efforts of a great genius to level all ranks, but, as often, it has been found to re-assert itself when the new order, after its brief hey-day of glory, gradually succumbs to the power of older institutions."[1]

The Modern Revival

In spite of the eclipse of these centuries, some life remained in the sect. With the nineteenth century there

[1] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 607.

must have come a renewal of vigour, although there is little material by which to judge of this. As early as 1851, an acute observer speaks of the Vaishṇavas as being the most active of the Hindu sects in Bengal.[1] An awakening of interest generally in Chaitanya and in his Vaishṇavism began in the third quarter of the last century. A very definite influence in this respect was the partiality shown by the rising Brahmo Samaj, at the height of its vigour, for the type of religious devotion peculiarly associated with the Chaitanya Vaishṇavas. The introduction, by Keshub Chandra Sen, of many of the characteristic features of Chaitanya's bhakti into Brahmo Samaj practices, and the evident Vaishṇava influence upon his own religious experience at this period, form one of the most interesting chapters in the history of the Brahmo Samaj. Keshub was doubtless influenced in this direction by one of his followers, Bijoy Kṛishṇa Gosvāmī, who, although himself a Gosvāmī in the Chaitanya sect, had been won to the Brahmo movement. Keshub himself, however, belonged to an old Vaishṇava family, and had, as it were, the taste for Vaishṇava ways in his very blood. An increasing emphasis on bhakti, the use of the rustic drum and cymbals, the institution of saṅkīrtan and nagarkīrtan, all showed the influence of Vaishṇava ideas. The chief of the Brahmo festivals, the Maghotsab, celebrated with great emotional fervour at least in earlier days, had its origin in this period of Vaishṇava influence. A well-known historian of the Samaj wrote thus of this period:[2]

> The character of this devotional or bhakti movement is not only Hindu, but of that peculiar type of Hinduism known as the religion of the Vaishṇavas. The previous history of the Brahmo Samaj was noted for nothing so much as a cold colourless rationalism and anti-idolatrous contemptousness, which sneered at every sect showing any definite spiritual type. And the Vaishṇavas were noted for nothing so much as grotesque personal habits, intense wild devotional excitement leading sometimes to unconsciousness. The Vaishṇavas were

[1] *Calcutta Review*, Vol. XV, p. 171.

[2] Mazumdar, *Faith and Progress of the Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 223-24.

neither socially high nor distinguished by modern education. The Brahmo Samaj was the resort of the learned, the brilliant, the aspiring, the well-to-do. It is difficult to say what induced the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj to borrow the old-fashioned plebian forms of Vaishṇava music and musical appurtenances. The unfashionable khole and kartāl were suddenly adopted, although not without protest on the part of some. The unscientific popular tunes of the Vaishṇavas came into vogue. In fact, the Brahmo Samaj seemed to incorporate into itself the entire spirit of Vaishṇavism.

Chaitanya undoubtedly had a place of peculiar influence in Keshub's mind and heart. He included the Bengal saint in the list of those great figures of religion to whom he led his Samaj in spirit pilgrimage from time to time. His biographer says:[1]

> Keshub's tenderest relations, after those with Christ, were with Chaitanya, the prophet of divine love in Bengal. The emotional development of his religion was very greatly indebted to this sweet character. . . . It meant the opening up of a new world of religious feeling, it laid the foundation of a new spiritual relationship with . . . the apostle of bhakti.

The prominence thus given in the cultured circles of the Brahmo Samaj to Chaitanya and his religious experience must have helped very materially to arouse new interest in his cult. Indeed, one writer of our day goes so far as to say that, "except for Keshub Chandra Sen, the educated community of Bengal would not be in a position to understand and appreciate the teachings of Śrī Gaurāṅga."[2]

The neo-Kṛishṇa movement, which sprang up in the eighties of the nineteenth century, was the most direct cause of the revival of Vaishṇavism. It was largely a literary movement, flowering in a large number of books on Kṛishṇa and the Gītā. This movement led to the study of the old Vaishṇava literature of Bengal, and to the rediscovery of the stores of religious inspiration in the beginnings of the Chaitanya movement. Two works on Chaitanya, among others, resulted from this study, both the product of the facile pen of the late

[1] Mazumdar, *Life and Teachings of Keshub*, pp. 108, 164.

[2] B. C. Pal, *The World and the New Dispensation*, January 17, 1918.

Shishir Kumar Ghose, of the well-known Calcutta newspaper, *Amṛita Bazar Patṛikā*. The *Amiya Nimāi Charit*, a biography of Chaitanya in Bengali, has been very widely read, and is one of the best known books of modern Bengal. His *Lord Gaurāṅga*, a two-volume work in English, is an extraordinary production and has also had considerable influence. The personality of the author of these books, and the interests represented by the newspaper which he and his brother, Motilal Ghose, made famous, were factors of great potency in stirring up new life and activity in the sect. The influence emanating from this *Patṛikā* group was by far the most energetic single influence working for the revival of Chaitanya Vaishṇavism. Two emphases were evident in all their work. The social aspect of Chaitanya's life and teaching was put to the fore. He was hailed as a great social reformer who had risen up against the caste system and heralded a new day. The writings of this group also taught a clear-cut incarnation doctrine. Chaitanya was the Lord Gaurāṅga, deity incarnate, the counterpart in Bengal of the Lord Jesus Christ in Palestine.

The revival of interest in Chaitanya revealed itself in various ways. Efforts to interest the educated classes were evident. The production of literature was stimulated, vernacular magazines sprang up, informal organisations were formed in many places for weekly saṅkīrtan and the study of Vaishṇava teaching, lecturers went about preaching on bhakti and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the loose organisation of the district and provincial *sammilanī* (associations) was revived, and it was sought to make the celebration of Chaitanya's birthday a popular affair. For some years in Calcutta this was celebrated in one of the public squares of the city, with massed nagarkīrtans and a popular programme. One interesting feature of the revival was the development of what has been termed neo-Vaishṇavism, the creed of some latter-day adherents attracted by certain phases of Vaishṇavism, but having no connection with the sect. Prominent among such might be named

men like Bepin Chandra Pal and C. R. Das, the former of whom has written voluminously on Vaishṇava philosophy, but whose interpretations, indebted at times to Christian theology, are not wholly acceptable to orthodox paṇḍits.

A marked increase in the temples and sacred sites at Navadvīp is one result of the modern revival. A Chaitanya temple has also been erected in Benares in recent years, in the hope of getting a foothold for Gaurāṅga in that hoary centre of Śaivism. Efforts are being made to found at Navadvīp a new Sanskrit ṭol, which shall serve as a centre for the study and propagation of the philosophy of the Bengal Vaishṇavas. A commodious site has been secured through the generosity of a stalwart adherent of Vaishṇavism, the Mahārājā of Cossimbazar, but so far the scheme has not been completed.

Influence of the Sect on Bengal Society

Before concluding this survey of the history of the sect, it may be well to attempt a brief estimate of its varied influence on the life and thought of Bengal society.

The *Bengali language* itself owes no small debt to the Chaitanya movement. For by it the vernacular of the people was lifted to a place on a par with Sanskrit as the medium of works of scholarship. Previous to the literature of the sect, Sanskrit was the language used for serious and dignified work. Bengali was looked upon as beneath the level of scholarship, to be used with apologies. The great output of the Chaitanyas changed all that. In their hands the language of the people was seen to be a fit vehicle for the poet and the philosopher.

When we consider the *influence of the sect upon the literature* of Bengal, it is difficult to appraise it at its full value. Its effects were far-reaching. The movement was an outburst of religious enthusiasm, vital and real. Its effect upon literature was life-giving. It broke away from forms and customs, literary as well as social, and made for itself new modes of expression. In the songs

which sprang forth in such profusion the lyrical feeling of the poets invented new metres and enriched the poetic possibilities of the language.

> In the Vaishṇava writings, we find a freedom from the rigidness of classical models—not to be mistaken for the inartistic and unrestrained excesses of the vulgar, but which is prompted by a superior poetic faculty, conscious of its art, making light of restrictions, though keenly alive to the natural rhythm of metre and expression.[1]

Biography was peculiarly a gift of the sect to Bengali literature. There was no such thing before the Vaishṇava narratives. Mythology there was, "monstrous fables, as remote from history as any fiction,"[2] and stories of the gods, but none of that portrayal of contemporary human events as seen in the actual facts of a man's life. To have introduced so vital an element into the literature of a race, and brought a whole people's interest down out of the clouds of supernatural phantasy to the solid earth of our common humanity, is no slight distinction for a religious movement.

This note of reality likewise marked the brilliant outpouring of song which was so distinctive a feature of the sect's development. The Vaishṇava poetry was full of reality. It was the expression of feeling, the voicing of the heart's experience, vital and transforming. Poetry hitherto, being too much the handmaid of royal courts, had lacked this quality. The amount of these Vaishṇava songs is amazing. They are a lyric ocean in themselves, and from this ample source the stream of poetic inspiration in Bengal has been flowing ever since.

In its *influence upon the Hindu social order*, as we have seen, the Chaitanya movement in the days of its first exuberance came near being a social revolution. It created a new spirit within the lower ranks of society that threatened the spiritual supremacy of the Brāhman priesthood and their vested interests. In proclaiming the faith that in common worship and devotion men were bound together in a relationship that transcended caste and family

[1] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 601. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 444.

distinctions, Chaitanya came near the truth, proclaimed long before in Galilee, that underlies all true democracy. The work of later leaders, in admitting to Vaishṇava fellowship caste groups that had no standing in the social order, especially the great mass of degraded Buddhist mendicants, was courageous social pioneering directly in line with Chaitanya's principles. Furthermore, the success with which, in the face of unceasing social pressure, the sect upheld and maintained for a century the validity of spiritual leadership, entirely irrespective of caste convention and priestly authority, was in itself no mean social contribution.

These social heterodoxies succumbed in the end; for the sect lacked a spiritual dynamic sufficient for the task of transforming society. But to set up the ideals it did, and to have upheld them, if only for a time, was a fact of social significance. To this day, in Bengal, Vaishṇavism is the last resort of the social outcaste. Degraded though this idea of asylum may be, and bereft of all spiritual significance, there yet remains in it something of its nobler origin.

As an *educational influence* of no mean value, a good word can be said for this movement. As the counterpart of its offer of common religious privilege to all alike, it also brought something of intellectual enlightenment to the masses. The stimulus of the new faith and its exaltation of the Vaishṇava scriptures led many a humble and illiterate devotee to become literate enough to possess and enjoy something of the sect's literature. At least, this is the evidence of the ancient MSS. that have been collected in large numbers in recent years. A large proportion of them have been recovered from very humble homes, where they have been preserved for centuries with religious veneration, the ability to read them having long since been lost. Many of these MSS. were themselves written by low-caste men.[1]

The kīrtans and *kathakatās*[2] of the sect were a

[1] *H.B.L.L.*, p 598.

[2] A *kathaka* is a professional story-teller, who recites stories from the scriptures.

potent educational force in themselves. They are the singing and reciting, respectively, of the great themes and the familiar stories of religion. It is true that these forms of popular instruction were not entirely original with the Vaishṇavas, but their vigorous use of them and the new life and content put into them by the Chaitanyas made of them a distinctive feature of the sect's activity. Let the historian of Bengal's literature speak of the influence of these popular modes of education:

> The *kīrtana* songs were once a madness in Bengal, and even now they carry great favour with a certain section of our community. The singers are generally acquainted with scholarly Vaishṇava works. They commit to memory most of the *padas* of the Vaishṇava masters, and it is the people of this class who have been supplying the noblest ideas of self-sacrificing love to rural Bengal for more than 350 years.[1]

Of the kathakas he has this to say:

> It is impossible to exaggerate the great influence which they wield over the masses. . . . The manner in which the modern kathakas deliver stories with the object of imparting religious instruction and inspiring devotional sentiments in Bengal is derived from the Vaishṇavas. . . . The kathakas of the old school were scholars, poets and finished singers. The effect which their narration produced was wonderful. Born story-tellers as they were, their oration was coupled with power of music, the effect of all of which was heightened by their command over language and their great scholarship. All this made them the most popular figures in Bengali society, and it is impossible to describe the hold which they had upon the women of our country. When their day's work was done, they would hasten in the evenings to hear the stories narrated by kathakas at the house of some one, who was generally a man of means and of religious temperament. The stories inspired the minds of women by instances of the lofty sacrifice that Hindu wives have made for the sake of virtue, chastity and faith. . . .
>
> As I have said, it was the Vaishṇavas to whom the kathās, or stories, owe the elegant form in which we at present find them. The Vaishṇava gosvāmīs, or priests, have up to the present day the monopoly of this profession.[2]

Thus it can be claimed for the Chaitanya movement that it served to stimulate these educational processes for the masses of the population, and also made possible

[1] *H.B.L.L.*, pp. 584-85. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 585, 589-90.

the rising into real scholarship of men of ability from low castes. Śyāmānanda, for instance, who, as we have seen, was the preacher who proclaimed the faith across Orissa, rose to scholarship and honoured gurushiip in Vaishṇavism from a very humble caste. Ordinarily the portals of Sanskrit scholarship would have been shut to such as he, but in the ṭols of the Vaishṇava scholars caste was no bar.

In this broadening out of life's possibilities women also shared. They were not merely the gainers from the stimulation to education generally which we have noted, but there seems, also, to have been in this Vaishṇavism an embryonic recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of woman's personality which must be called distinctive.

In the descriptions given by Mukundarāma, who vividly portrays every detail of social life in Bengal in the sixteenth century, we find the women of the lower castes receiving a fair education, not to speak of those who belonged to the higher castes.[1]

It is interesting to note that the education of girls continued to mark the sect, to some extent at least, up to the modern era. In a report on vernacular education in Bengal for 1835-38, by the Rev. W. Adam, special Government Commissioner, it is pointed out that the only exception to the universal illiteracy among females was found among the mendicant Vaishṇavas, who could read and write and instructed their daughters.[2] Time and again in the records of this sect mention is made of women who were honoured for their learning and sanctity. Such a one was Jahnavī, the wife of Nityānanda. After his death she became widely known through her pilgrimages, but also because of her character and attainments. In the *Vaṁśīśikshā* we find the interesting fact recorded that Jahnavī gave dīkshā (initiation) to two young men. Another instance is that of Hemalatā Devī, a daughter of Śrīnivāsa of the famous trio. She seems to have been something of a guru also, as the author of the well-known historical

[1] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 598. [2] *Calcutta Review*, January, 1916, p. 68.

work, *Karṇānanda*, is spoken of as her disciple. Chaitanya's own wife, Vishṇupriyā, was for many years an honoured figure in the sect, honoured alike for her sanctity and for her relation to Chaitanya.[1]

Just when the ascetic order of the sect was thrown open to women we cannot say, but it is clear that, disreputable as the terms vairāgiṇī and *Vaishṇavī* have become to-day, women did find in the freedom of the mendicant life something besides inducements to irregular relations. At one time these female ascetics played some real part in the community as a type of zenāna teachers. In the autobiography of Devendra Nath Tagore we find mention made of unwelcome visits of *Mā-Gosāins*[2] to the household of his childhood, evidently meaning the vairāgiṇīs of the Chaitanya Vaishṇavas. In Hunter's work on Orissa there is an interesting reference to the part played by these Vaishṇava vairāgiṇīs in zenāna education in Bengal. It is true, he refers to a sub-sect of the Vaishṇavas of whom no trace is to be found to-day. He speaks of them as holding the theory of women's independence, evidently a sort of Bengali suffragette group born out of season. The women were trained as teachers of women-folk for the purpose of spreading the sect, and in the early years of the nineteenth century were an educational asset. So much so, that at one time the Government had in mind a normal school for these Vaishṇava vairāgiṇīs with a view to using them in educational work.[3]

A word should be included here about the educational influence of what seems to have been a distinctively Vaishṇava product—the village *Hari Sabhā*. This was a regular meeting for reading and discussion of the scrip-

[1] Mādhavī Dāsī is a name that should be included in a list of these Vaishṇava women. She was an ascetic of Orissa noted for learning and devotion, and something of a poet as well. One of her poems is included in the *Poems by Indian Women*, published by the Association Press.

[2] Mother Gosvāmī, a colloquial term for a vairāgiṇī; more common is *mātājī*.

[3] *Antiquities*, Vol. I, p. 110.

THE JOT BAŃGLA TEMPLE, VISHNUPUR, BENGAL.

THE MADAN MOHAN TEMPLE, VISHNUPUR, BENGAL.

tures, lectures, kīrtan, and the development of bhakti generally. Meetings were monthly as a rule. Often a building was erected for the purposes of the *sabhā* by common subscription, and, failing this, it was held in private houses. The emphasis was distinctly educational, and it must have had a real influence in the life of the village. It was a democratic institution uniting all and supported by all. This sabhā probably has no parallel in Hinduism, and it comes nearer to the Western type of congregational worship and teaching than anything else in Hindu practice. To-day these village sabhās have largely given place to the larger assemblies known as sammilanīs, which meet only occasionally and rotate from place to place. They are modelled upon the Congress type of meeting, which is a political product of modern India.

This hasty review of the influence of the sect upon Bengal life would not be complete without a brief mention of *its contribution to art.* We have already seen how the treasures of Brindāban, its four oldest temples, unrivalled in north India, were built under the supervision of Chaitanya's disciples, Sanātana and Rūpa. It is noteworthy that the best of the old temples in Orissa and Bengal are Vaishṇava. Those in Orissa are in ruins, but in Bengal, thanks to the work of the Archæological Department, the Vishṇupur temples still stand as striking examples of the Bengal type of temple architecture. These temples, two of which—the Madan Mohan and the Jot Bañgla—are shown in illustration, are all built of brick. The fine carving on the brick front of the Madan Mohan temple is especially noteworthy, each one of the panels representing a group of figures. The construction of the Jot Bañgla temple draws attention by its curious effect as of two huts joined together. The characteristic which is peculiar to the Bengal temple generally, and of which the Vishṇupur temples are the best examples, is the curving roof, evidently in imitation of the village hut. All of these temples bear inscriptions.

CHAPTER VI

THE TEACHING OF THE SECT

CHAITANYA was not primarily a thinker. From the record of his life it will have become abundantly clear that his main interests were not intellectual. Not only did his absorption in bhakti leave no time or energy for the life of scholarship, but—what is far more to the point—the increasing strain of an impossible emotionalism upon a highly-wrought nervous system, made serious intellectual effort quite out of the question as the years went on. His whole mode of life was against his being a thinker. We are not surprised, therefore, that he wrote nothing except the *Ashṭaka*, the eight couplets already noted.[1] There is no means of knowing his own thought, except as it is transmitted to us in the biographies. And these were written a considerable time after his death and embody the theology of a later day.

The origins of the teaching of the sect have been briefly indicated in the first chapter. The principal factor in the development of Vaishṇavism in Bengal seems to have been Mādhvaite. Vishṇupurī in the thirteenth century, and Mādhavendra Purī in the fifteenth, both Mādhvas, were influential in stimulating the Vaishṇava faith. The one by his celebrated work, *Bhaktiratnāvali*, made the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* popularly known, while the Purī helped materially to spread the Kṛishṇa cult and gained numerous disciples. Among these disciples of Mādhavendra Purī were all the men

[1] Kavikarṇapura, a contemporary of Chaitanya's, makes the explicit statement in his *Chaitanya Chandrodaya* that Chaitanya wrote nothing about his doctrines. See R. L. Mitra, *J.A.S.B.*, 1884, Part I, p. 111.

who had greatest influence on Chaitanya's life. His two closest friends and leading disciples, Advaitāchārya and Nityānanda, the two gurus who initiated him into the life of devotion, and other Vaishṇava friends whom he revered, all were Mādhvas. It seems clear, therefore, that Chaitanya began his religious life as a Mādhva.

But the Mādhva influence was considerably modified. The Rādhā cult was wholeheartedly accepted very early in his religious life. We are guided here by our knowledge of the works in which Chaitanya found his chief delight. Among these the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa singers of Bengal and Mithilā were prime favourites. From them he received the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa legend, probably without any doctrinal emphasis, since these poets reveal no special influence. Later, as we have seen, he came into touch with other works, and was variously influenced in his thinking. Both the Vishṇusvāmīs and the Nimbārkas directly contributed to his theological development and the choice of a philosophical basis for his movement. This latter, indeed, he seems to have taken direct from the Nimbārkas.[1] His conception of the glories of the heavenly Brindāban is probably from the Nimbārkas also. But it is to be noted that there is no evidence of his following the Nimbārka's exaltation of Rādhā into the eternal consort of Kṛishṇa. In this matter he seems to have followed the Vishṇusvāmīs. Just how far, or in what further detail, the Chaitanya movement drew upon these older sects is not entirely clear, but in general it may be said that, as regards ritual, religion, and theology, he was indebted to the three groups named.

How far the teaching of the sect as found in its most authoritative source—the *Charitāmṛita*—is the product of theologians of Brindāban, and how far truly representative of Chaitanya's thought it is impossible to say. It seems most improbable, however, that much of the elaborate theologising put into his mouth could have been uttered by him. It is not consistent with the

[1] *V.S.*, p. 85.

general impression given of him in the book itself, for repeatedly he is portrayed as careless of śāstric knowledge, more and more indifferent to disputation, and increasingly given up to emotional ecstasies. The truth of the matter is given in these words, referring to Kṛishṇa-bhakti:

> Here there is no śāstric reasoning, nor consideration of (theological) dogma. This is its nature; its quality is essence of sweetness.[1]

The long philosophical disquisitions, the marvels of exegesis, the elaboration of fine points in theology credited to Chaitanya in chapter after chapter, could only be the work of keen and highly-trained minds devoting all their powers to problems of thought and construction of theological systems.

The few verses believed to be Chaitanya's own are expressions of devotion simply.

Tradition ascribes eight ślokas to him, but the *Chaitanya Charitāmṛita* seems definitely to mention him in connection with five only.[2] They are the following:

> 1. Your all-pervading power is multiplied by your own name, and there is no fixed time for remembering it. Such kindness from you, O powerful one, to my misfortune, has not caused love in me.
>
> 2. Humbler than the grass, more patient than a tree, honouring others yet without honour oneself; such a one is ever worthy to take the name of Kṛishṇa.
>
> 3. O lord of the world, I do not want wealth, or relation, or beautiful wife, or poetic genius; birth after birth may I have disinterested faith in you.
>
> 4. When, at the chanting of your name, will my eyes be filled with flowing tears, my voice become choked, and my body thrill with joy?
>
> 5. My moments are lengthened into cycles, and my eyes are turned into the rainy season itself; my whole world is made empty because of the separation from Govinda.

The remaining three ślokas, about which there may be some doubt, are given also:

> May the praise of Srī Kṛishṇa be triumphant, which cleanses the mirror of the mind, extinguishes the great forest fire of the world, sheds moonlight upon the lily of prosperity, lives in its beloved knowledge, swells the sea of joy, gives the full taste of pure nectar at every step, and washes the whole self (of man).

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxiv, p. 415.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, III, xx, pp. 598-600; see also p. 602.

O son of Nanda, graciously count me, your servant, as a particle of dust on your lotus-feet, fallen as I am in the terrible ocean of this world.

Even if he lifts and crushes me under foot, or cuts me to the quick by avoiding me, or treats me anyway, the profligate, still he is no other than the lord of my heart.

At one point in the *Charitāmṛita* we find a clue to what was very likely the real relation between Chaitanya and the work of his disciples. Sanātana is described as being commissioned by Chaitanya to prepare the *smṛiti* for the sect.[1] He pleads his inability and his ignorance, whereupon Chaitanya suggests in outline the various points to be treated. As this was doubtless the inspiration of Sanātana's great work on ritual—the *Haribhaktivilāsa*[2]—it is likely enough that Chaitanya sustained a somewhat similar relation to the theology of the Brindāban scholars. He inspired them for the task, suggested its main lines, and furnished them with ample material for illustration and analysis in his own life of devotion. Thus we find that the greatest theologians of the sect, Rūpa and Jīva, based their theology on the *Brahma Saṁhitā*, one of the works which Chaitanya discovered and held in such high regard.

In sketching the teaching of the sect we shall confine ourselves largely to the *Charitāmṛita*, and shall not attempt to discriminate, beyond what has been said, between the teaching of Chaitanya and his followers. An exhaustive treatment has not been attempted, our desire being, rather, to set in as clear outline as may be, the main tenets of the sect.

Theological

1. *The Idea of God*

In its philosophy the Bengal school lays claim to orthodoxy, because it accepts the Upanishads, the *Brahma Sūtras* and the *Gītā* as authoritative scriptures, and the One-without-a-second as the Supreme Reality. It agrees with the Vedānta in describing that Reality

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxiv, p. 438. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxv, p. 450.

as possessing the three familiar attributes, *sat*, *chit*, *ānanda*. It is in the interpretation of these attributes that Vaishṇavism departs from the Vedāntic position. To the Vedāntist they signify aspects of pure being, undifferentiated and unmodified. To the Vaishṇava the third term, *ānanda*, offers the key to the interpretation of the Supreme Being. It is pure bliss, self differentiated, the ground of all life and the source of all the sentiments (*rasa*) that give human life its meaning and value. A text from the *Taittirīya Upanishad* gives the authoritative clue:

> Having performed austerity, he understood that Brahma is bliss (ānanda). For truly, indeed, beings here are born from bliss, when born they live by bliss, on deceasing they enter into bliss.[1]

From this interpretation of Reality the characteristic doctrine of a personal God of love and grace is derived, with loving devotion as the natural relation between this Being and the creatures which have sprung from his creative will.

Bhagavān, or Hari, is the name given to the Supreme. He is infinite in nature, power and attributes. The creative, destructive and sustaining aspects which appear in Hindu theology as Brahmā, Śiva and Vishṇu, are manifestations of his nature. All the forms in which the Supreme has been conceived of and worshipped in Hindu thought are included in Bhagavān. He is the source of infinite forms. Of all these forms, that of Kṛishṇa is the most perfect. He is deity in his most entrancing aspect; the Supreme at his best, if we may so put it.[2] Nothing can be conceived of the beauty and blissfulness of the Eternal Reality that transcends Śrī Kṛishṇa. Although inclusive of the Vedāntic idea of negative being, he is personal, a being full of grace and mercy, whose pleasure it is to seek the welfare of his devotees. "He has no other work than to gratify his servants' wishes." He seeks the loving devotion of his worshippers, and graciously gives

[1] Hume, *Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, p. 291.
[2] Cf. *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 211.

himself to them.[1] He is himself the essence of love, the home of all blissfulness and delight. His supreme delight is in love.[2] Only by love and adoration can he be attained.[3]

Of the infinite powers of Kṛishṇa three are chief. They are called the internal, the external and the marginal; the *chit* or intelligence power, the *māyā* or illusion power, and the preservation or *jīva* power. From the jīva power comes the individual soul, from the māyic power comes the whole creation, while the chit power represents the Supreme intelligence and will. The exact nature of the Supreme's relation to the material creation and its inhabitants is something of a mystery in the sect's philosophy. By his infinite powers the universe and its creatures have come into being, and they have a substantial reality, but a clear statement of that reality is admittedly impossible. Human souls are of the Supreme and dependent upon him, atomic portions of his nature, but yet separate and distinct. Neither monism nor dualism is acceptable to the Chaitanya thinker; with the result that he takes refuge in an intermediate position, a compromise, called *achintya-bhedābheda, i.e.* "Incomprehensible dualistic monism."[4] "This is not understood," a modern writer confesses, "but felt in the soul as an intuitive truth."[5]

The chief of all Kṛishṇa's powers is the chit power, and of this the crowning manifestation is the *hlādinī*, the power of delight. This is the ecstatic aspect of the divine, the supreme erotic principle by which all find delight in love, deity and creature alike:

> Hlādinī is so named because of giving delight to Kṛishṇa, who tastes delight through that power. Kṛishṇa himself is delight and tastes delight. Hlādinī is the cause of the bhakta's delight; the essence of Hlādinī is called prema (love).[6]

> Rādhā is the modification of Kṛishṇa's love. Her name is the very essence of the delight-giving power.

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xv, p. 292.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 213.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, III, iv, p. 498.
[4] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xx, p. 348.
[5] *C.M.L.P.*, p. 29.
[6] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 213.

Hlādinī makes Kṛishṇa taste delight. Through Hlādinī the bhaktas are nursed.[1]

This conception of the Supreme nature is the ruling idea of the sect. He is the source of perfect bliss, producing delight, and revelling in delight. "He is the attractor of all, the delighter of all, the great elixir of life." He fascinates men, mind and body, intoxicating them, stealing their hearts. Sweetness predominates in his nature. In comparison with this supreme blissfulness spiritual delight "is as grass."[2] The manifestation of this ecstatic or erotic principle of the Supreme is eternal līlā, sport or play, and the ideal representation of this is the *gopī-līlā*, the play of Kṛishṇa with the milkmaids at Brindāban. It is "a system of which love and sport form the distinguishing characteristics."[3]

Considerable theological confusion appears in the teaching about God, because of the potpourri method employed of including all schools of Indian thought indiscriminately in support of what is essentially a theistic faith. Hopelessly mixed up with contradictory philosophy is the vast mass of Purāṇic mythology. Particularly confusing is it to have the various stages of the theological development undistinguished, with varying conceptions found side by side. Thus there appears the absolute Brahma of the Vedānta, Vishṇu as Brahma, Kṛishṇa as the incarnation of Vishṇu, Kṛishṇa as Vishṇu, Kṛishṇa as Brahma. The effect is that of inconsistency in the conception of the Supreme. From the viewpoint of the religious experience of the sect, however, there is no dubiety. The faith of Chaitanya and his followers was intensely theistic; for them Kṛishṇa is the Supreme being, whom to love and serve was the chief end and joy of man.

2. *The Doctrine of Incarnation*

The incarnation doctrine of the sect is really twofold; first as it treats of Kṛishṇa, and second of Chaitanya. There is little or no discussion of the theory of

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, I, iv, p. 44. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxiv, p. 415. [3] *V.S.*, p. 84.

incarnation. The familiar teaching of the *Gītā* is accepted. "In every age Kṛishṇa becomes incarnate."[1] We are also told that "The dwelling place of all [forms of God] is in the highest heaven, beyond all māyā; when any of them descends to earth, it is called an incarnation."[2] Kṛishṇa as the Supreme Being is declared to have assumed endless incarnations. But among them all his appearance among the groves of Brindāban is the supreme manifestation:

> This Kṛishṇa in Braja is the most perfect god.
> All other forms may be called perfect and less perfect.[3]

This is the determinative doctrine of the sect. "The highest, best and most spiritual ideal of divinity is in Kṛishṇa."[4]

The second phase of the doctrine has to do with Chaitanya. In all probability he himself did not lay any claim to divine honours. We find repeated instances recorded where he deprecated any tendencies to honour him as more than man.[5] The accounts in the *Charitāmṛita* of his revealing himself to various disciples in the form of deity are a part of its legendary deposit. But the belief that he was an incarnation of Kṛishṇa certainly took form during his lifetime, and it was therefore easy for his biographers to represent him as revealing his own deity.

The doctrine concerning Chaitanya as an incarnation of Kṛishṇa is clearly expressed in the *Charitāmṛita* and repeatedly recognised:

> The account of the Satya, Treta, Dvāpar and Kali *yugas* (ages). White, red, dark, and yellow are serially the four colours. Kṛishṇa puts on these four colours and establishes the *dharma* of the age. . . . The dharma of the Kaliyuga is the chanting of Kṛishṇa's name. This he has inaugurated by assuming yellow colour, and has given love and devotion to people together with his disciples. Brajendra-nandan (the son of Braja's lord, *i.e.* Kṛishṇa) is establishing his religion, and people are dancing and singing in love, making saṅkīrtan.[6]

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, vi, p. 185. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xx, p. 358.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 222. [4] *C.M.L.P.*, p. 27.
[5] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xviii, p. 323; cf. *Vaṁśīsikshā*, II, p. 82.
[6] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xx, p. 362-63.

Sanātana speaks of what the marks of God are: yellow complexion, works such as the bestowing of love and saṅkīrtan; [he who has these] he certainly is the incarnation of Kṛishṇa.[1]

Chaitanya created this love saṅkīrtan: his incarnation is for the preaching of religion.[2]

In the *Haribhaktivilāsa*, the authoritative work on ritual for the sect, there is no direction given for the worship of Chaitanya, but at the beginning of each chapter there is an invocation to him which seems to indicate a state of mind verging on worship.

The peculiar ideas of the sect led to an elaboration of the incarnation doctrine in connection with Chaitanya which is characteristic. He was held to be the incarnation not only of Kṛishṇa, but of Rādhā as well. We read that Kṛishṇa was charmed by his own beauty, and desired to experience the supreme feelings that Rādhā felt for him.[3] Thus he took form in Chaitanya as himself and Rādhā combined. The germ of this idea is clearly found in the *Charitāmṛita* in these passages:

Having assumed the feelings and beauty of Rādhikā, you have become incarnate in order to relish your own delight.[4]

Rādhā and Kṛishṇa are one soul in two bodies. They delight each other by tasting love. The two of them are now one Chaitanya *Gosāi*. The two have become one in order to enjoy the supreme emotion (Mahābhāva).[5]

Later writers developed this theme with delight. This theory of double incarnation explains the golden hue of Chaitanya's body, which, were it not for the Rādhā element, would have been dark like Kṛishṇa's.[6]

A still further elaboration of the ideas connected with the milkmaids of the story makes the principal followers of Chaitanya incarnations of these gopīs.

3. *The Conception of Sin.*

The teaching about sin is decidedly meagre. The conception of *avidyā* (ignorance) and māyā (illusion),

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xx, p. 365.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xi, p. 25.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxi, p. 375; II, viii, p. 213.
[4] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 221.
[5] *Ch.Ch.*, I, iv, p. 44. Gosāi is a colloquial abbreviation of Gosvāmī.
[6] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 222.

which, in spite of the sect's anti-Śaṅkara philosophy, affects all its thought of the soul's life in this world, tends to make the conception of sinfulness unreal. For a soul enfolded in ignorance and fettered by illusion sin is hardly an ethical problem. Yet the language of ethical ideas is constantly used. In the absence of any clear doctrine inconsistency is apt to result.

Various sins are mentioned, such as abuse, blasphemy in calling a man God,[1] lust and anger.[2] Theological heresy is counted a grievous sin.[3] The general term, "sin against Vaishṇavism," is likened to a wild elephant rooting up a precious plant.[4] This sin is anything that stands in the way of the development of bhakti toward Kṛishṇa. As the love of Kṛishṇa is the supreme object of life, so that is sin which prevents men from pursuing this object, whether it be worldliness, fleshly lusts or wrong philosophy.

There is a curious passage in the *Charitāmṛita* which suggests a note of vicarious suffering for sin. One of the disciples asks that all the sins of mankind be laid on his head in order that men may be freed from their sufferings. Chaitanya replies that this is unnecessary, as they will all be freed without suffering:

> You have prayed for the salvation of all beings in the world. Yes, they will find deliverance without undergoing punishment for their sins. Kṛishṇa is not powerless; he has all kinds of power. Why should he make you suffer for their sins? They whose welfare you desire have all become Vaishṇavas, and Kṛishṇa takes away the sin of Vaishṇavas. The whole world will be saved since you have wished it, for to Kṛishṇa it is no labour to redeem all.[5]

This suggestion of vicarious suffering for the sins of others must be taken as a hyperbolic expression without any meaning, for it bears no relation to the teaching of the sect. The above passage effectually disposes of the idea of suffering of any kind in connection with deliverance from sin. This deliverance calls for no suffering or effort whatever. It is accomplished by a mere gesture of omnipotence.

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxv, p. 445.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxii, p. 380.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxv, p. 442.
[4] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xix, p. 337.
[5] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xv, p. 292.

The great solvent for sin is the repetition of Kṛishṇa's name. That alone washes away all sins; one utterance, even, suffices.[1]

4. *Salvation.*

The idea of salvation, common to most Hindu thought as *mukti*, emancipation or liberation, is conceived of as having five aspects, or states. These are as follows:

Sālokya (being in the same plane with God).
Sāmīpya (nearness to God).
Sārupya (likeness to God).
Sārshti (equalling the glory of God); and
Sāyujya (absorption in God).[2]

Of these five modes or aspects, the last, sāyujya is that, which is traditionally associated with the term mukti in Hindu thought, at least in Śaṅkara's Vedānta. To salvation as thus conceived the Chaitanya theologians took vigorous exception. So much so, that the very term mukti became distasteful to them. Although it included aspects identical with Vaishṇava thought, the fact of its being associated with the Vedāntic conception of absorption made it suspect and undesirable. As one of Chaitanya's disciples exclaimed:

> At the sound of sāyujya the bhakta feels hatred and fear. He prefers hell to it.
>
> At the utterance of the word mukti, hatred and fear arise in the mind; at the utterance of the word bhakti, the mind is filled with joy.[3]

There emerges here a fundamental difference between Vaishṇava and Vedāntic thought. To the Vaishṇava thinker the Vedāntic doctrine destroyed the possibility of that which gave meaning to salvation, namely, the enjoyment of God. To him the very idea of salvation involves personal consciousness, and a real relationship between lover and beloved. The illusory doctrine of Śaṅkarāchārya, by which the reality of the soul's existence is only seeming, cut way the basis of the Vaishṇava conception of life, both here and in the heavenly Brindāban, and made of bhakti only a fleeting

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xv, p. 289; III, iii, p. 492; and many more.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, vi, p. 195.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, vi, p. 195; cf. II, ix, p. 235; III, iii, p. 493.

experience. When this vital difference in conceptions is clearly grasped it is easy to understand the theological antipathy of the Vaishṇavas at this point. Their dearest experiences and hopes were at stake.

The state from which men are saved is that of bondage to the world, and that to which they are saved is an eternal experience of love. Souls are eternal servants of Kṛishṇa, but through forgetfulness they become fettered and entangled in things material, which is the power of illusion.[1] As long as the soul continues thus, it is subject to birth and re-birth, with all the sufferings that accompany the working of the law of *karma*. But when, by whatever means, the soul, becoming conscious of its rightful relation to Kṛishṇa as its lord and saviour, turns to him in faith, it is rid of illusion and finds salvation through the experience of bhakti. The soul is saved by faith; faith breeds bhakti, and bhakti is fulfilled in perfect love (*prīti*), which is the supreme end and good of the soul.[2]

> Therefore bhakti is the means of gaining Kṛishṇa, which is called *abhidheya* in all the śāstras. Just as the gaining of wealth yields pleasure as its fruit, by which sorrow flies away of itself; so, similarly, the fruit of bhakti is the springing up of love to Kṛishṇa, by the taste of which the cycle of birth and rebirth is destroyed. But the removal of poverty, or the cessation of rebirth, is not the fruit of love; its highest aim is the enjoyment of love's felicity.[3]

This recognition of love as the soul's highest state is repeatedly emphasized. "Delight in Him is the supreme human attainment . . . the highest beatitude comes only from serving his feet." It is "the highest fruit, the supreme human bliss, in comparison with which the four human attainments are as straw." The *bhakti-mārga* (path of devotion) is the only sufficient way to salvation. Other ways there are, such as *jñāna*, karma, and *yoga*, and these are acknowledged as effective in the past, but they are superseded now and are worthless as compared to bhakti. Without an admixture of bhakti none of them can lead to salvation, while bhakti alone

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xx, p. 349. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xx, p. 350.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xx, p. 351.

is all-sufficient.[1] The difficulty with these earlier ways is their inability to produce love, which is the essence of salvation.[2] Furthermore, they give to the mukti which is their goal a tinge of selfishness. They are suggestive of effort and desire in the pursuit of salvation, whereas bhakti has no thought of self or gain, it seeks only to pour itself out in an abandon of devotion to its lord. For this further reason, in addition to the important one noted above, the term mukti is rejected by the Vaishṇavas, and bhakti takes its place as the all-inclusive term for salvation, both as to method and goal. Liberation and devotion are treated as two definitely contrasted ends, and liberation is consistently condemned. That salvation is not the goal of bhakti is repeated again and again. The devotion of the faithful is disinterested, seeking nothing beyond the service of love.[3]

Salvation through faith and bhakti is not limited, as the other ways necessarily are. One needs to be neither a paṇdit, nor an ascetic, nor well-born.[4] The chanting of the divine name creates bhakti, and this is open to the lowest castes. Here sounds the great note in Chaitanya's teaching, revealing his deepest insight into the nature of man. A Brāhman of good family is not thereby worthy to worship Kṛishṇa; neither is a low-caste man necessarily unfit. In the worship of Kṛishṇa there is no consideration of caste or family.[5] "Even an ignorant man, by Kṛishṇa's grace, gets to the opposite shore of the ocean of the emotions."[6]

5. *Heaven and Future Existence.*

As we have seen, the sect's doctrine of salvation involves a very real conception of a heavenly life. This heavenly existence is not a mere intermediate affair, a temporary bliss between rebirths on earth. Through bhakti, disinterested and entire, bondage to rebirth is broken, and the soul attains a celestial body

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxii, p. 380.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, ix, p. 236.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, vi, p. 195.
[4] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxii, p. 397.
[5] *Ch.Ch.*, III, iv, p. 499.
[6] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xix, p. 343.

and is raised by Kṛishṇa to equality with his own nature.[1] This felicitous state is conceived of as an eternity of the sports of Brindāban, in which the faithful share in serving Kṛishṇa as did the gopīs.

Existence in the spiritual universe apparently is divided into different realms. We read of Vaikuṇṭha,[2] the heaven of Vishṇu, of Goloka, the heaven of Kṛishṇa, and also of the eternal Brindāban. The two latter are generally treated as the same, although there is occasional discrimination. The followers of the esoteric, or higher form of bhakti, attain to Brindāban, while those of the lower form go to Vaikuṇṭha.[3] There seems to be a distinct note of inferiority in this assignment. However, by modern Vaishṇavas, these seemingly different levels are interpreted as simply different aspects, or stages, of heavenly existence, since anything like a hierarchy of Vaishṇavas would be contrary to the sect's teaching and fellowship. As there is little clear or systematic teaching on this subject, the eschatological ideas of the sect cannot be formulated very satisfactorily.

6. *Revelation.*

The Supreme Being reveals himself directly in the soul, and through the guru and the scriptures. Of the first there is very little. "If Kṛishṇa is gracious, then some fortunate man is taught by him, as his guru, within his heart." In this direct inspiration of the soul of man, his intuition (*ruchi*) and not his reason (*jukti*)[4] is the channel. Indeed, the reason is looked upon with distrust.[5] As for the śāstras, the Vedas are accepted as the only revelation, eternal in nature. But this is only the lip service of theologians, desiring to maintain the appearance of orthodoxy. Various passages, indeed, are found, side by side with these orthodox statements, in which they are flatly denied. The real

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 220; xxii, p. 392, also xxii, p. 388, "All the qualities of Kṛishṇa are transferred to the bhakta."
[2] Bengali, *Baikuṇṭha*.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxiv, p. 419.
[4] Sanskrit, *yukti*.
[5] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 222.

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feeling of the sect is more truly reflected in the frank statement reported in the third book of the *Charitāmṛita* to the effect that Vedāntic study is to be eschewed as it cuts the nerve of devotion.[1] The Purāṇas are held to be the explanations of the Vedas, and we are told that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the Upanishads speak as with one voice.[2] This Purāṇa is held to be the only satisfactory commentary upon the Upanishads, the Vedas and the *Brahma Sūtras*.[3] Thus the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the supreme scripture of the sect. Next to this the *Charitāmṛita*, the biography of Chaitanya, is held in highest reverence.

There is no canon, although certain works have held pre-eminence, such as those used by Chaitanya and the standard authorities for ritual and theology.

The third channel of revelation, the guru, was accepted by the sect as a part of the Vaishṇava heritage. Chaitanya's own experience would have been sufficient, doubtless, to fix the guru in the sect as essential, had that been necessary. Fortunately, his insistence on the spiritual qualifications of the guru made the relationship of real worth. The guru must know the mysteries of Kṛishṇa.[4] This is the one essential. Caste status or privilege of any kind has nothing to do with it. He is to be served with utmost honour, for this is one of the means of grace.[5] The extent to which the guru is believed to be the direct agency of Kṛishṇa is indicated in the following passages:

> Bhakti is to be heard from and asked of the guru.[6]
>
> The guru who gives instructions I know as the very self of Kṛishṇa.
> The guru is the self of Kṛishṇa according to the Śāstras, and Kṛishṇa shows kindness to the devotee in the form of the guru.[7]

It is difficult to believe that the actual identity of the guru and the Supreme is taught here, but there is no doubt of the lengths to which this doctrine was carried

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, III, ii, p. 483.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxv, p. 446.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxv, p. 449.
[4] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 211.
[5] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxii, p. 393.
[6] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxv, p. 447.
[7] *Ch.Ch.*, I, i, p. 12.

in the exaltation of the guru, " the most irrational of all Hindu irrationalities."[1]

It is not likely that Chaitanya or the early leaders of the sect emphasized the extreme phase of this doctrine. The Brindāban fathers and the associates of Chaitanya were all gurus, because of their spiritual attainments and their association with him. So it was with the great leaders of the following century. Their piety and power made them gurus by right. In time, however, the guruship became hereditary and largely bereft of spiritual significance and the doctrine was so taught as practically to deify the guru and make him more feared than the wrath of God himself. Such texts as the following are found in the later literature :

> The guru is always to be worshipped : he is most excellent from being one with the mantra. Hari is pleased when the guru is pleased : millions of acts of homage else will fail of being accepted. When Hari is in anger, the guru is our protector, when the guru is in anger, we have none.[2]

In all manuals on ritual for guidance in worship used by the rank and file of Vaishṇavas in Bengal, there are elaborate directions for the reverence of the guru preceding that of Chaitanya.

7. *Man and the World.*

The reality of the world and the creatures which inhabit it, as we have seen, is stoutly maintained as against the illusion theory of Śaṅkarāchārya, although the nature of this reality is not entirely clear. Human souls are only separated parts of the Supreme, sparks from the central flame ; and yet they are distinct from him and independent, determining their own actions. We have already noted the philosophical basis of this doctrine, called achintyabhedābheda, illuminatingly defined by a paṇḍit of the sect as " inconceivable simultaneous existence of distinction and non-distinction."[3]

The world is the *māyik-jagat*, the sphere where

[1] Wilson, *Religious Sects of the Hindus* (C.L.S.), p. 85.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 85 note.
[3] *C.M.L.P.*, p. 29.

the power of illusion easily binds men in fetters of material enjoyment, in consequence of which they suffer the pangs of perpetual rebirth. But it is also a place where the noblest operations are possible to the soul, where bhakti may be learned and spiritual character developed. Man is meant to be the servant of the Supreme, but easily becomes the slave of māyā. From the standpoint of the law of karma and its workings, life in this world is suffering and sorrow, but to the Vaishṇava thinker the rigours of the karmic law are modified by the joys of bhakti, which are possible to all. The dominant note, therefore, is that the world and its life is good. The eye of faith can see the Lord in one's fellowmen, and in every object of Nature.[1]

In general it may be said that the sect teaches a noble doctrine of man. No man is too low to be incapable of response to the divine. The capacities for devotion only need to be aroused and cultivated to make them blossom in bhakti. Woman is included in this conception. There is no direct teaching to this effect, but the theory and practice of the sect confirm it. Woman's devotion, indeed, is at the heart of the sect's theology; for it teaches that all worshippers in their attitude toward the divine should be feminine.[2] This teaching is an advance upon that which has marked much of Hinduism, with its exclusion of women and low castes from the higher privileges of religion.

Religious

The Life of Bhakti.

The whole religion of the sect is summed up in its teaching about the life of bhakti. This is set forth as

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 221. This does not mean a conception of Nature revealing God such as is familiar to Western thought. It is that every object takes on the form of Kṛishṇa to the eye of the devotee. He does not see natural objects as Nature; he sees only Kṛishṇa, just as the tree trunk or the dark cloud, to Chaitanya, often seemed to be the Lord. Trees thrilling with delight and exuding tears of honey at the touch of Chaitanya, and tigers uniting in the chanting of Kṛishṇa's name, are hardly ideas related to the modern conception of Nature!

[2] *Ch.Ch.*, III, vii, p. 527. See below pp. 111-12.

a whole-hearted attitude of love and devotion to Kṛishṇa, that engages all the powers of life in complete and selfless service to him alone. The beauty and sufficiency of this way of life is proclaimed with almost endless repetition. It is the glory and joy of life, the one true course, the only real wealth this world offers, the supreme end of all existence.[1] Compared with bhakti, all other means of religious devotion are obsolete, ineffectual and void. As we have noted, jñāna, karma, and yoga are given scant reverence, although recognised as honoured ways to God in days gone by.

> The former command is karma according to the Vedas, dharma, yoga, jñāna. After finishing all these comes the greatest command; if on the strength of this command the devotee has faith, he leaves all karma and worships Kṛishṇa. . . . By faith in Kṛishṇa all work is done.
>
> All methods of worship (*sādhana*) have worthless results. Without Kṛishṇa-bhakti they can never give strength.[2]

There are no barriers set up round about this way of life. It is open to all, be he scholar or ignorant, Brāhman or low-caste. It is universal in scope, and should be practised by all, under whatever circumstances of time, place and conditions.[3] The end of the practice of bhakti is that state of pure, disinterested love in which all thought of self is swallowed up in complete bliss. This is the *summum bonum* of life.

The nature of bhakti which in so catholic a manner welcomes all sorts of men will naturally be as varied as human capacity, and as rich in emotional feeling as the powers of the human heart. Thus we find different grades of bhakti corresponding to different types of religious feeling experienced among men. Five different stages are set forth in the *Charitāmṛita* and ascribed to Chaitanya. In their present form these well-known five stages have doubtless come from Chaitanya, but they were not original with him. They are found among others in the oldest bhakti documents, such as the *Nārada Sūtras* and the *Śāṇḍilya Sūtras*, and were

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 219. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxii, pp. 387, 380.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxv, p. 447.

evidently fairly well defined forms of bhakti teaching. Chaitanya received them as such, and gave them the currency that has attached them to his name. These five stages are described as follows. The first is called *śānta*, peaceful, and is the quietistic stage, a calm fixing of the mind upon Kṛishṇa. "A śānta votary's attachment is like an odourless flower." The second stage is the *dāsya*, service, in which the relation of the disciple to his lord is that of a servant or slave. Next is the *sakhya*, friendship, where the relation is the trustful comradeship of friend and friend. In the fourth stage, *bātsalya*, fondness, the relationship takes on the tenderness of the parent's feeling for the child; while the fifth stage, *mādhurya*, sweetness, is represented by the lover relation with its element of passion. Each stage shares the quality of the preceding, but adds to the sum total a new emotion and achieves an increase of delight. Thus the fifth and supreme stage combines all the qualities of the other grades, and is "of wondrous deliciousness."[1]

Bhakti is thus conceived of as an experience capable of an ascending scale of feeling; it is a relationship to Kṛishṇa of love and faith that gains in scope, intensity and power, as the devotee progresses in devotion. Beginning with quiet meditation little stirred by emotion, the bhakta advances through the emotional realisation of the relation of servant, friend and parent, until, with ever-deepening feeling, he is swept into a passionate ardour of the soul toward its lord that finds its most fitting symbol in the abandon of that passion which exists only between the sexes.

It is as the illustration or exemplification of this climactic fifth stage of devotion that Rādhā holds so important a place in the sect's thought. This accounts for her exaltation both in the songs and in the theology. Chaitanya accepted her as the ideal of devotion. In the abandon of her passionate love for Kṛishṇa he saw a compelling illustration of what should be the ardour of

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, pp. 206 ff.; also II, xix, pp. 338 ff.

every devotee's bhakti. "The supreme emotion" (Mahābhāva), says the *Charitāmṛita*, "is the quintessence of *prema* (love). The lady, Rādhā, is the embodiment of that supreme emotion."[1]

Two schools arose in the sect over the interpretation of Rādhā. The question at issue was as to her relation to Kṛishṇa, whether it was that of mistress or wife. Those who maintained the latter, the *svakīya* doctrine, included most of the Brindāban fathers. But it is clear that the *parakīyabādīs*,[2] those who held Rādhā to be the wife of another and mistress of Kṛishṇa, very soon gained the ascendency. This was doubtless due to the immoveable influence of the old myth about the gopīs. It would seem, also, that the Sahajiyā cult was not without influence in this matter, that cult which for a hundred years and more had taught the doctrine of salvation through the worship and love of a woman other than one's own wife. We have noted in the introductory chapter how extensively this Sahajiyā doctrine coloured the writings of Chaitanya writers in the following centuries. A curious chronicle has been found recently, which further confirms our feeling that the parakīyabādīs fairly early swept the field. This is an official Muhammadan court document, bearing the date of 1717. It describes a sort of formal trial, which was also a debate, for the purpose of deciding between these two parties. Both doctrines were represented by their ablest champions from all parts of Bengal and Orissa, and Benares as well. The Vaishṇava scriptures were taken as the basis of discussion, including the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Chaitanya's teaching, Śrīdharasvāmī's famous commentary on the *Bhāgavata*, Sanātana's commentary on the tenth chapter of the *Bhāgavata*, and other less known works. Great crowds attended, and the discussion continued over a period of months. The parakīyabādīs finally gained the victory, and in consequence the *svakīyabādī* Gosvāmīs lost

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 217.
[2] Sansk., *parakīyavādīs*.

standing and surrendered their disciples throughout the country.[1]

Just where Chaitanya stood in this controversy it is impossible to say. Kṛishṇadās Kavirāj, the author of the *Charitāmṛita*, was a parakīyabādī, and he therefore puts this doctrine into the mouth of Chaitanya. Considering Chaitanya's great admiration for the works of Jayadeva and Chaṇḍī Dās, who preach this view, it would appear that he inclined toward it himself. At any rate, the teaching of the sect became wholly of this doctrine. Thus illicit passion, the love of the mistress for her lover, became the universally accepted symbol of the soul's devotion to God. "Of these [kinds of love] Rādhā's is the crowning ideal, whose glory is described in all the śāstras," says the *Charitāmṛita*.[2]

Here we have a very curious fact, that sets the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa literature apart from all other Hindu writings in this respect. That which this sect has chosen as its representation and symbol of the soul's thirst for God is in direct contravention of one of the most cherished ideals of the Hindu social order down through the centuries, namely, the chastity and fidelity of Indian womanhood.

The stories of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa stand alone in Hindu dramatic literature in this respect. In Sanskrit dramas a married woman is nowhere represented as faithless or as the object of other men's love.[3]

Dr. Sen writes thus:

In the poetic literature of the Hindus, the fidelity of woman has always formed the loftiest theme and has naturally supplied the highest poetic inspiration. But Vaishṇava literature glories in Rādhā, who breaks the sacred ties of domestic life and walks in the unrestrained path of freedom from all social bondage. How could a society so rigidly fastidious in point of woman's honour admire Rādhā and allow her such an elevated place in their literature? The answer is a very simple one. Rādhā, as has already been said, is a religious symbol, a typification of the free worship offered by the human soul to God.[4]

[1] Sen, *Typical Selections from Old Bengali*, Part II, p. 1638.
[2] II, viii, p. 209.
[3] N. Chattopadhyaya, *The Yātrās*, pp. 11-12.
[4] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 561.

That something, which in the Hindu wife and mother is looked upon with the utmost abhorrence, should be chosen as the most fitting representation of religion, is, to say the least, a strange procedure. The explanation turns upon the place of marriage in Hindu society. Rarely, if ever, is it a romantic attachment, the result of love's free play, for matches are arranged by the elders and the young people concerned are only passive agents. After marriage, whether love develops or not, the whole round of wifely duties and devotion are enjoined upon the woman by sacred law. Therefore, says the Vaishṇava apologist, the love of the wife can hardly serve as the symbol of unfettered devotion. Whereas the Hindu woman who gives herself to romantic love outside the marriage relation risks her all. She gives everything that makes life worth while in the abandonment of her devotion. Thus she becomes the most fitting symbol of the soul's search after God. Rādhā is the supreme example of this passionate love.

The Attainment of Bhakti.

The cultivation of bhakti is a subject that receives considerable space in the *Charitāmṛita*. From this point of view two general orders of bhakti are distinguished, *vaidhī*[1] and *rāgānuga*. The first is called regular, and is developed in accordance with śāstric rules; the latter is governed by no rules whatever, but follows the natural inclinations of the heart, as was true of the gopīs in their infatuation for Kṛishṇa. Of the regular or vaidhī bhakti, many ways of cultivation are set forth. Sixty-four is the traditional number. Of these, however, five chief modes are distinguished as of special and particular value. These five are "the society of holy men, kīrtan of Kṛishṇa's name, listening to the reading of the *Bhāgavata*, dwelling at Mathurā and reverential service of his image";[2] in short, fellowship, song, scripture, pilgrimage and image worship. Any one

[1] From *vidhi*, rule.

[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxii, p. 394.

of these modes alone will produce bhakti, and "Even a little of the five creates love for Kṛishṇa."

As a matter of fact, the charmed number is nine rather than five. This is recognised in the *Charitāmṛita*,[1] and in all manuals for popular use nine forms of bhakti are specified. The item as to pilgrimage has been dropped in the process of expansion.

Far and away ahead of all other forms of attaining bhakti is the kīrtan and its accompaniments. No other means can so lift the heart into the full experience of ecstatic feeling as the chanting of the holy name.

> In the Kaliyuga the singing of the name is the great means; in Kaliyuga the sacrifice of nāmakīrtan is equivalent to worshipping Kṛishṇa. . . . Through saṅkīrtan the sin of the world is destroyed, the heart is purified, and practice of all kinds of bhakti is initiated. . . . If the name is taken while eating or lying down or anywhere—without restriction of time, place or rule—all success is achieved.[2]

But the heights of bhakti are to be reached in more mystic ways not open to the mass. For those passionate souls who soon pass beyond rule and form there is an inner way, an esoteric teaching. They are followers of the second order of bhakti, the rāgānuga, in which passionate desire for mystic union with the loved object is the distinguishing mark. The ordinary means of arousing bhakti are not discarded necessarily, but they are looked upon as external only.

> The practices are two, external and internal; listening and praising are done with the body as external practice; within the mind having conceived the ideal person, Kṛishṇa is served day and night in Braja.[3]

This appears to be a somewhat cryptic passage, but its meaning is clear. It commends a concentrated imaginative process as more effective in realising the bliss of bhakti than any outward means.

The inspiration and guide—"the ideal person"—of this more secret form of bhakti is the gopī of the Brindāban legend. The bhakta by meditation seeks to

[1] III, iv, p. 499. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xi, p. 257; *Ch.Ch.*, III, xx, p. 599.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxii, p. 398.

make the whole Brindāban līlā live before him. He visualizes in his mind's eye the amorous sport that Kṛishṇa carried on with the milkmaids. But more than this, he imaginatively enters into it, and by playing the part of one of the enamoured maids, he experiences in his own mind the passionate feelings that are so glowingly pictured in the literature; feelings, indeed, for which the analogy, it is frankly admitted, is lust (*kāma*).[1] In this manner he brings himself into a state of ardent feeling for Kṛishṇa. The emphasis upon this doctrine in the *Charitāmṛita*, and, therefore, in all succeeding works upon bhakti, is very marked. It is the *rājatattva*, the royal doctrine.[2] The following are sample passages:

Kṛishṇa's sport with Rādhā is extremely deep, and is never found in the attitudes of dāsya (service), bātsalya (fondness), etc. It is within the right of the *sakhīs*[3] only, and from them this sport spreads. Without the sakhīs this sport is never nourished; they enjoy their own sport by spreading it. No one has any access to this sport except the sakhīs and those who follow Kṛishṇa in the attitude of the sakhīs. They attain to the privilege of service to Rādhā-Kṛishṇa in the grove. There is no other way to this end.[4]

Therefore, accepting the attitude of the gopīs, they think on the sport of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa day and night. By meditating on Kṛishṇa in the realised body they only serve him; through the sakhī attitude, they gain the feet of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa. The son of Braja's lord[5] is never gained by worshipping in the knowledge of his glory, but only by the way of the gopīs.[6]

Only in the form of a gopī is the pleasure of *rāsa* gained.[7] Underlying this emphasis upon the gopīs, and explaining it, is the idea that Kṛishṇa is the sole male in the universe, and only as his worshippers conceive of themselves as female can they rise to the full

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 218.
[2] The ethical aspects of this doctrine are considered in Chapter X.
[3] Female friends, *i.e.* the gopīs.
[4] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 216.
[5] Kṛishṇa.
[6] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 219.
[7] *Ch.Ch.*, II, ix, p. 229. The *rās-līlā* is the circular dance in which Kṛishṇa danced with the gopīs. There is an annual festival of this name celebrated in October-November, which was originated by Rūpa and Sanātana. This word is to be distinguished from *rasa* which means emotion.

experience of passionate devotion. This explains why prominent Vaishṇavas are considered to be incarnations of the gopīs. It is a curious doctrine, produced by the exaltation of the Gopī-myth into sacred scripture.[1]

This passionate bhakti, using the sensuous images of this highly erotic story to stimulate its fervour, passed into further emotional phases common to all mysticism.

> There is a blessed stage which transcends the sphere of all these "virtuous acts" and is not limited by the scriptures. This is called the rāgānuga, or that faith which follows its own course—the stage in which the recollection of the very name of God calls forth tears, the whole body trembles like a leaf, the material loses its grossness, and the body becomes spirit. The reciting of the name creates strange emotions in the soul—they know no bounds and are not limited by the śāstras. . . . It is a state where consciousness and unconsciousness meet. . . . One who is in this blessed condition gives up all religious rites prescribed by the Vedas.[2]

The Emotions of Bhakti.

It is hardly necessary, for the purposes of this study, to attempt an exposition of the elaborate analysis of love's emotions found in the teachings of the Bengal Vaishṇavas. It is a labyrinth of involved and intricate classification. Surely the delight of the Hindu mind in minute analysis is here illustrated to perfection; for these theologians represented not only the philosophic mind of India; they also combined with it an abounding delight in bhakti, which led them to dwell upon its minutest emotions with infinite relish. The general basis of the analysis is found in the Hindu system of rhetoric and poetics far antedating the time of Chaitanya. But credit must be given to the thinkers of the Chaitanya school for the way in which they worked out their psychology of love. Among all bhakti sects they stand pre-eminent as specialists in this field.

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, III, vii, p. 527.

[2] *V.L.*, p. 225. In this passage Dr. Sen summarises a description of Rādhā's emotions given in a well-known seventeenth century Vaishṇava work by Jadunandana Dās, the *Karṇānanda*, p. 64.

The five stages of bhakti already described are accompanied by corresponding emotions, known as the five permanent emotions. These are basic. But love has shades of feeling far more numerous than these, of which ten at least are experienced in passing through the five stages. From another point of view four main divisions are set up, and these are sub-divided into 2, 13, 8 and 33 classes of feeling respectively. Still another phase of the analysis has to do with the development of tender relations between Kṛishṇa and Rādhā, its divisions defining steps in the process, such as the dawn of love, the sending of messages, the secret stealing forth for the meeting of love, the meeting itself, the final separation, the spirit union, etc. This is made familiar by the lyrics of the sect, which are classified under these heads, each head having many sub-divisions. Suffice it to say of this subject that as many as 360 emotions of love are defined and illustrated by the theologians of the sect, huge works being devoted to this labour of love.

The Use of Images.

One of the modes of cultivating bhakti, it will be noted, is the reverential service of Kṛishṇa's image. As the rather extraordinary assertion has been made that Chaitanya rejected idolatry,[1] it may not be amiss to devote a few words to this point. The influence of images upon Chaitanya was enormous. Rarely did any image fail to stir his feelings, and, as far as one can see, the reason was that each image to him was God. Here is a typical picture of a Purī experience:

> With great eagerness he went to Jagannāth's house. . . . The eyes of the Master were thirsty like a pair of bees, and they drank in the lotus-like face of Kṛishṇa with greatest eagerness. The eyes of the god surpassed the blooming lotus; his cheeks glittered like transparent sapphire stone. His lips were sweeter than the bloom of the *bāndhuli* flower. A slight smile was like a ripple of nectar on his face. The sweetness of the beauty of his face increased moment by moment, and it was drunk like bees by the million eyes of the faithful. Their thirst increased as they drank; their eyes could not

[1] *C.M.L.P.*, p. 57.

turn from the lotus-like face. Thus did the Master together with his devotees gaze at the blessed face till mid-day. Perspiration, trembling, weeping, went on continuously, but the Master had to restrain himself in order to have a clearer view. *Bhog* (serving of food, screened from view) and *darśan* (sight) followed each other. The Master sang kīrtan at the serving of food and forgot everything in the delight of gazing.[1]

In addition to his own contagious example, he explicitly taught the place and value of images in worship.

Kṛishṇa has now manifested himself in the form of wood and water, and creatures are saved by sight and ablution. . . . Śrī Purushottam (Jagannāth) is present as deity in the form of wood, and Bhāgīrathī is present as deity in the form of water. Do thou, Sārvabhauma, worship the wood god, and thou, Vāchaspati, serve the water god.[2]

To the young disciple, Raghunāth, he sent a *Śālagrām*, a dark-coloured stone used by Vaishṇavas as an emblem of Krishṇa, which he had used for years himself, bathing it, feeding it, and bedewing it with tears, exactly as though it were an image. "It is the body of Kṛishṇa," Chaitanya said, "serve it with zeal."[3]

The philosophical explanation of this worship is put into Chaitanya's mouth thus :

It is a sin to acknowledge difference in gods. God is the same [varying] according to the meditation of the devotee. The one form [of God] is made into different images.[4]

But his practice was not guided by philosophical considerations. Chaitanya fully shared the viewpoint of his time, and believed in the reality and blessedness of the god's presence in the image before him. He needed no defence or explanation. The practice was necessary to his life of bhakti, and the stimulus which it gave to his emotions was sufficient proof, if any were needed, of its truth. As a matter of history, it seems clear that Chaitanya's influence had much to do with changing the character of the worship at Purī in this respect. To his influence is credited the introduction of the elaborate service of the image of Jagannāth, such as bathing and

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xii, pp. 263-64.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xv, p. 291.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, III, vi, pp. 521-22.
[4] *Ch.Ch.*, II, ix, p. 230.

feeding, and it was at his instigation that King Pratāpa Rudra ordered the songs of Jayadeva to be sung before the image daily.[1]

The bearing of this intense image-worship upon the spiritual quality of Chaitanya's bhakti will be considered in the final chapter. However, it may very properly be observed here that this great dependence upon an outward object in worship, whether conceived as symbol or as deity itself, is a very serious qualification of the catholicity of Chaitanya's bhakti teaching. It clearly reveals the fact that the religion of the name, with its worship of praise, was not all-sufficient even for the master-singer himself.

A Bhakti Shorter Catechism.

As a brief summary of the chief points of the Chaitanya bhakti-teaching, it may be of interest to conclude this section with a part of the famous dialogue between Chaitanya and the gifted Rāmānanda Rāy, the Vaishṇava scholar-in-politics of his day. It might well serve as a catechism of the fundamentals of the faith :[2]

Question Which knowledge is the highest of all ?
Answer There is no knowledge but devotion to Kṛishṇa.
Ques. What is the highest glory in all types of glory ?
Ans. Being reputed to be Kṛishṇa's devotee.
Ques. What is counted wealth among human possessions ?
Ans. He is immensely wealthy who has love for Rādhā-Kṛishṇa.
Ques. What is the heaviest of all sorrows ?
Ans. There is no sorrow except separation from Kṛishṇa.
Ques. Who is considered liberated among those who are liberated ?
Ans. He is the foremost of the liberated who practises devotion to Kṛishṇa.
Ques. Among songs what song is natural to creatures ?
Ans. It is the song whose heart is the love-sports of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa.
Ques. What is the highest good of all creatures ?
Ans. There is none except the society of those who are devoted to Kṛishṇa.
Ques. Whom do creatures incessantly remember ?
Ans. The chief things to be remembered are Kṛishṇa's name, qualities and sports.

[1] *Antiquities*, Vol. II, p. 110. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, pp. 219-20.

Ques. Among objects of meditation which should creatures meditate on?
Ans. The supreme meditation is on the lotus-feet of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa.
Ques. Where should creatures live leaving all behind?
Ans. It is the glorious land of Brindāban, where the rās-līlā is eternal.
Ques. What is the best of things to be heard by creatures?
Ans. The Rādhā-Kṛishṇa love sports are a delight to the ear.
Ques. What is chief among the objects of worship?
Ans. The name of the most adorable couple, Rādhā-Kṛishṇa.

Ethical and Social

The Vaishṇava ethic springs from the same source as does its theology. It proceeds directly from bhakti. Indeed, says the Vaishṇava, true bhakti must of necessity flower in moral conduct. The good man, therefore, and the true bhakta are the same. The ethical teaching of the *Charitāmṛita*, however, impresses one by its meagreness. It does not seem to be a primary interest. The moral fruits of bhakti are taken for granted by the Vaishṇava, and he is not particularly concerned with them further. This fact is recognised by a modern biographer of Chaitanya and explained thus:

> Lord Gaurāṅga never posed as a teacher, but only one among his fellows, seeking Kṛishṇa. . . . What he did was to grant bhakti, which so thoroughly purified the blessed being that it became hateful to him to break a moral law. His followers never preached moral doctrines to their fellows, knowing full well that moral life must follow a religious life.[1]

The deeper implications of this fact will be discussed in the final chapter. The chief ethical teachings of the sect are familiar and need not detain us long.

The Vaishṇava Character.

Mercy toward all creatures, *jīvadayā*, was strongly impressed on Bengal Vaishṇavism, because of the sect's violent reaction from the grossness of the Śākta animal sacrifice, so prevalent in mediæval Bengal. It is an aspect of the *ahiṁsā* doctrine which was so congenial to

[1] *Gaurāṅga*, Vol. II, Appendix xx, note.

the Vaishṇava spirit and became a part of its ethical teaching. The strict vegetarianism that marks the true Vaishṇava is a logical expression of this teaching. All fish, flesh, and fowl is abjured, not even eggs being allowable to the faithful.

Humility is probably the most characteristic feature of the real Vaishṇava bhakta. It was clearly taught by Chaitanya, although briefly enough. It is the message of the best of the Sanskrit Āshṭaka, the eight verses attributed to Chaitanya, which have been quoted already. The same familiar analogy occurs in the *Charitāmṛita.*

> [The bhakta] although of high position considers himself inferior to grass, and acts patiently like the tree. For the tree when cut says nothing, and never begs water even though parched to death, but gives away its wealth to him who asks, and shelters others, itself enduring the sun and rain. The Vaishṇava ought to be without pride even though of high rank; he must respect all creatures, knowing that Kṛishṇa is present in them.[1]

Continued emphasis upon this trait in the sect led men who were *Kulin*[2] to deprecate the honourable lineage of their families, and caused the common use of the name *Dās* (servant) by Vaishṇava writers of all castes as a means of checking pride of authorship, and as an incentive to the spirit of humility.[3]

Linked with humility are tranquillity, freedom from worldly desires, and purity of heart—all the fruit of absorption in bhakti.

> According to the śāstras these signs are found in him in whose heart this emotion springs up. He is not affected by worldly afflictions. . . . His time is not wasted [all acts] being referred to Kṛishṇa. He has no fear of enjoyment, success, or sensual gratification. Even the best counts himself lowly, strong in faith that Kṛishṇa will be merciful.[4]

We find the statement of the Vaishṇava ideal of character well summed up in the following passage:[5]

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, III, xx, 599.

[2] Bengal Brāhmans of unique social position owing to their descent from the Kanouj Brāhmans, supposedly settled in Bengal before the Moslem invasion.

[3] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 570.

[4] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxiii, p. 401.

[5] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxii, p. 388.

These are the signs of a Vaishṇava, indicated only, as everything cannot be said : compassionate, free from spite, of the very nature of truth, spotless, charitable, gentle, pure, possessing nothing, doing good to all, peaceful, wholly surrendered to Kṛishṇa, desireless, harmless, steadfast, victorious over the six passions, eating sparingly, restraining the self, honouring others without self-esteem, tender-hearted, grave, friendly, poetic, skilful and silent.[1]

This is doubtless an idealisation, but it sets forth a clear type of character, an approximation to which has always been discernible in the best lives of the sect. The inspiration of the ideal is clearly the life of Chaitanya.

Concerning Chaitanya's social teaching there has been some misapprehension. This is not strange, for the facts are somewhat confusing and there is ground for divergence of opinion. By emphasizing only that element in his teaching which appears to be anti-caste, certain modern writers, who desire to make him appear a great social reformer, have created a misconception. For that is not the whole truth concerning Chaitanya's attitude, and both elements in his teaching and practice must be considered if we are to understand him aright.

Attitude towards Caste.

There is certain, clear evidence in the *Charitāmṛita* which goes to show that Chaitanya had no quarrel with the *varṇāśram dharma* (duties of the caste system), and that he accepted the traditional ideas of its authority in society. This comes out in connection with those disciples of his who had been received from Islam. Haridās, famed for his great sanctity, and the two brothers, Sanātana and Rūpa, evidently met with difficulty at Purī owing to the inveterate prejudice against them because of their origin. Chaitanya himself felt no hesitation in embracing them, even when Sanātana's body was covered with running sores, but he upheld as right the prejudice of others. Haridās scrupulously kept away from the temple, and took great pains that the servitors of the temple should not come near him, all with Chaitanya's approval. " I am a worthless low-

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxii, p. 388.

caste," he said, "I have no right to go near the temple." Sanātana would not use the road by the temple gate, for fear of contaminating the *sevāits*.[1] Chaitanya's commendation of this action is instructive:

> It is the nature of a bhakta to observe rank. The maintenance of dignity is the ornament of a sādhu. People ridicule when rank is broken, and both worlds are lost. My mind is pleased when propriety of conduct is maintained. If you do not act thus, who will?[2]

The word *marŷyādā*, which occurs four times in this passage (translated rank, dignity, etc.), clearly implies distinctions of caste, rank, etc. It is the dignity dependent upon these distinctions which Chaitanya commends Sanātana for observing. We have here, then, an explicit statement of Chaitanya's own attitude toward these things. It is to be noted, also, that there was some discrimination about eating with these two, even in the circle of Chaitanya's disciples. They were provided for a little differently from the rest. Chaitanya himself arranged for separate quarters[3] for Haridās and had the sacred prasāda sent to him. It is distinctly stated, also, that there were certain Brāhmans whose cooking Chaitanya could not eat.[4]

Over against these facts, which show Chaitanya as an upholder of the social order of caste, must be placed other evidence which seems to point to a wholly different conclusion. The very presence of the converts from Islam is proof of an attitude decidedly at variance with traditional ideas. His preaching of bhakti was undoubtedly revolutionary. He proclaimed a fellowship in worship that ran directly athwart the ideas of caste.

> God is wholly independent; his grace does not follow the lines of the Vedas. God's grace does not care for caste and family.[5]

And still more explicitly he stated his conviction thus:

> There is no consideration of caste or family in the worship of Kṛishṇa.[6]

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xi, pp. 254-55; II, xix, p. 331; III, iv, p. 501. A sevāit is a priest who serves in the temple.
[2] *Ch.Ch.*, III, iv, p. 501.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, III, iv, p. 497; II, xi, p. 254.
[4] *Ch.Ch.*, III, viii, p. 533.
[5] *Ch.Ch.*, II, x, p. 244.
[6] *Ch.Ch.*, III, iv, p. 499.

He quoted with approval these lines from the *Hari-bhaktivilāsa*, which are put into the mouth of Kṛishṇa:

> One cannot become my disciple merely by being a reader of the Vedas. Even a *Chaṇḍāl*[1] is loved by me if he only has faith. I bestow love on my devotee and accept his love; just as I am worshipped by the world, my disciple is similarly adorable.[2]

His commission to his followers in Bengal was that they should "give Kṛishṇa-bhakti down to the Chaṇḍāls and others," and he once described a Vaishṇava as one who abandons the varṇāśram dharma and takes shelter in Kṛishṇa.[3]

By-products of Bhakti.

From these and other quotations already considered, it will be clear that we are confronted in Chaitanya's teaching with a contradiction which makes his words and actions seen quite inconsistent. This contradiction can only be understood as we realise that the reform of caste, as such, probably never entered Chaitanya's mind. He was not concerned with social rules and regulations or their change. He was supremely concerned with religious worship. And this brought him into conflict with certain caste ideas. His social heterodoxy lay in his experience of bhakti. The powerful emotions of that experience were too expansive to be confined within prescribed limits. They refused to be regulated. Chaitanya saw that it was the nature of bhakti to create its own fellowship by a higher law than that of caste. All who could and would respond to its appeal had a right to its fellowship. His sole concern with caste was that its restrictions should not interfere with this community of worship. This was to Chaitanya's mind entirely a matter of religion. In so far as his bhakti-preaching broke down caste conventions it was social change undoubtedly, but the lowering of caste barriers was not its aim. This was purely an effect. This fellowship in religious worship did not

[1] An outcaste. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xix, p. 329.
[3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xv, p. 288; II, xxii, p. 391.

mean fellowship in eating or other domestic concerns.[1] These were social matters to be governed by the traditional rules. Such a sharp distinction between the religious and social spheres is rather difficult for the modern mind to appreciate, but that such was the point of view of Chaitanya seems clear.

This broadening out of the basis of religious privilege to include all castes was a great advance socially over the Brāhmanic teaching, which limited the higher reaches of religion to the privileged few. It was a conception with revolutionary possibilities which brought the sect into sharp conflict with orthodox society in the period after Chaitanya. A generation or more later this teaching was still potent, leading Brāhman and low-caste devotee to mingle in fellowship in the name of Chaitanya.[2]

The definite note of impatience with ritualism and ecclesiasticism, which occurs now and again in the teaching, is also of social significance. The emphasis upon kīrtan and the power of the name naturally would tend to breed an independence of the priest and give men a new sense of freedom. This note of release from priestly domination is sounded in the following passage:

> Kṛishṇa's name alone removes all sin. The nine kinds of bhakti are perfected by the name. It does not depend upon initiation or priestly ceremonies. A mere utterance of the name saves everybody down to the Chaṇḍāl.[3]

Chaitanya's teaching and practice with regard to the gurus of the movement was also a direct challenge to Brāhman supremacy. His insistence that spiritual capacity may be found in Śūdra as well as in Brāhman was a fine and true note, of democratic social flavour,[4] as was his refusal to allow the function of guru to be monopolised by any one group. Pre-eminent qualities of bhakti rather than caste position were the determining factor in his own choice of men, well illustrated in

[1] A partial modern parallel of great interest is the example of Mr. Gandhi, who seeks to abolish untouchability and yet discountenances inter-dining.

[2] *V.L.*, p. 156. [3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xv, p. 289. [4] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 211.

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the original Gosvāmīs, the six Brindāban Fathers. For a century thereafter there continued to be non-Brāhman gurus in the sect with Brāhman disciples. Two generations later, in Narottama, one of the leaders of the seventeenth century revival, we find the note of heterodoxy still sounding, declaring the universally recognised śrāddha ceremony to be unnecessary in outward observance, and pilgrimages to shrines futile error and useless labour.[1]

[1] Bhaktitattvasāra, *Prembhakti Chandrikā*, p. 33.

CHAPTER VII

THE LITERATURE OF THE SECT

Should all traces of the Chaitanyas as a sect disappear in time, their monument would remain, enshrined in the literature of Bengal. Were we to remove from that literature all that is connected with Chaitanya and inspired by him, the remainder would be a very greatly reduced and impoverished thing. The Chaitanya movement poured itself out so copiously in song and story as to form a wholly new chapter in the literature of the province. Rather, it is truer to say, the movement was of such vitality that it created for itself a literature whose influence has been potent ever since in the literary life of Bengal. It was like a newly-discovered spring, which for long poured out its waters in lavish abundance, fructifying whole tracts. One test of this vitality was its diversity. It did not exhaust itself in song, but created ever new modes for itself, enriching the fields of scholarship and adding biography and narrative as permanent contributions to the vernacular. The abundance of this literature, its variety and spontaneity, coupled with the solid learning and laborious toil given to it with such devotion, will continue, as long as the Bengali language persists, to bear testimony to the life and power which were in this movement.

In this chapter we shall attempt only an introduction to the literature of the sect, not a systematic study of it. Our aim is descriptive rather than critical; we shall try to set its parts in relation to each other, that it all may be seen as a whole. The interpretation of this literature and the estimation of its value as such is not our immediate purpose, although this is more or less involved throughout the study.

Biographical

In producing biography the Chaitanya movement broke virgin soil in Bengal. It is one of the contributions that gave it a sure place in the literature of the country. It was the impression of a strong personality upon the hearts of his friends that gave rise to this vital addition to literature. From the clouds of mythology and its attendant unrealities, a great human love and admiration brought men to the solid ground of reality. This was an immense gain for society. The narratives that were written about Chaitanya, however full of exaggeration and credulity, were still narratives of a man, full of human interest and appeal. Once originated, they were imitated in the case of later worthies, and thus biography became a distinctively Vaishṇava product, and Bengali writing greatly the gainer thereby.

There are four chief biographies of Chaitanya written in the vernacular. But behind them stand at least two works in Sanskrit, which are of importance because of the use made of them by the writers of the vernacular works. The first of the Sanskrit sources was a work called *Kaṛchā* (notes), by Murāri Gupta, a well-known scholar and physician of Navadvīp. It was written in Navadvīp in 1514, a few years after Chaitanya's departure from the city. Although older than Chaitanya by a good many years, Murāri had been his devoted friend and admirer. So great, indeed, was the devotion, and so deep the reverence in which he held Chaitanya's name after his taking sannyāsa, that he found no difficulty in believing all the legends about his miraculous exploits as a boy, which had already begun to be told. His record, which, as the name indicates, was in the form of notes, dealt largely with the youth of Chaitanya. His standing and reputation for learning gave his biographical material great weight in the Vaishṇava community. The later biographers incorporated his material into their work, and thus the legendary element was accepted by all. An edition of this *Kaṛchā* has been published in recent years in Calcutta.

The second of the Sanskrit sources was also in the form of notes, and was written by Svarūpa Dāmodara. There seems to have been no copy of this work preserved, but various authors refer to it. The most important of the biographies makes particular mention of it as a valuable source. Dāmodar was one of the very few intimate disciples who lived with Chaitanya during the last period at Purī. During the last years he became indispensable to Chaitanya, regulating his life in detail, reading his favourite works, and keeping watchful care over him. His notes were authoritative for much of the middle period and the last years of Chaitanya's life.

Of the four biographies, the first is the *Chaitanya Bhāgavata*. Its author, Vṛindāban Dās, was born in 1537, shortly after Chaitanya's death, and wrote his work about 1573. He was the grandson of a brother of the Śrīvāsa in whose courtyard Chaitanya began his movement. The book seems to have met with favour in the circle of the Brindāban Gosvāmīs; for they changed the original name which it bore, and called it by its present name in recognition of its worth. It is held in high honour among Vaishṇavas, although its inadequate treatment of the closing years of Chaitanya's life makes it incomplete. It is vitiated, also, as pure biography, by its theological presuppositions, its use of the legendary and incredible elements in the material, and also by the fact that the author is inspired by the desire to depict the life of Chaitanya as a replica of the boyhood of Kṛishṇa. Such an idea was highly acceptable to devout Vaishṇavas, doubtless, but it was not particularly happy as a biographical method. However, the work throws valuable light upon the people who surrounded Chaitanya, and upon the social and religious conditions of the time.

The *Chaitanya Maṅgala*, the second work of importance, was written at about the same time as the first, by an elderly man named Jayānanda. He was a member of a well-known Vaishṇava family, and as a child had seen Chaitanya. This work is not held in equal esteem

with its predecessor, although for what reason is not altogether clear. It may be because of the fact that it breaks the curious silence maintained by all the orthodox works concerning Chaitanya's death. This book gives a story found nowhere else, ascribing the end to fever brought on by an injury to Chaitanya's foot sustained during one of his frenzied outbursts of delirium. In other points also the facts narrated in this record differ from those of the other accepted works. For instance, this author gives us new information about Chaitanya's forefathers and the ancestral home. Among some scholars there is a suspicion of interpolation in connection with this biography, which may partly explain the feeling mentioned above.

The third and most authoritative of all the biographies is the *Chaitanya Charitāmṛita*, by Kṛishṇa Dās Kavirāj. This gives by far the fullest treatment of Chaitanya's life. In point of scholarship and exposition of the Vaishṇava faith it goes far beyond anything else written in the vernacular. This work attains an added interest, as well as sanctity, to the Vaishṇava, because of the circumstances of its writing. The author was a venerable ascetic of 79 years before he even commenced the task. Born in Bengal about 1496, of poor parents, of the Vaidya, or physican, caste, he was left an orphan at an early age. Falling under the influence of Nityānanda, while still a boy, he became a Vaishṇava and begged his way to Brindāban. Being accepted as a disciple by the Gosvāmīs, he spent all his days there in the ascetic way of life marked out by the Fathers of the faith. Now in the year 1575, at an age when most men are long since freed from labour, infirm and weak, the old scholar was prevailed upon to undertake this great task as a last gift to the community. The other orthodox biography, as we have seen, was incomplete. The leaders of the sect at Brindāban had long felt the need of an authoritative work which should set forth the life of their master completely, and at the same time furnish a recognised standard for theological teaching. The aged Kṛishṇa Dās seemed the scholar best fitted for the

task, and the burden was laid upon him as by divine commission.

For nine years the poor old man, in spite of his infirmities, toiled away at his labour of love. He incorporated in it all the materials available, and made use of the reminiscences of the Brindāban Gosvāmīs, most of whom had lived with Chaitanya at one time or another. Of these, Lokanātha Gosvāmī had been the boyhood friend and companion of the master at Navadvīp; Raghunātha Gosvāmī had lived for sixteen years at Purī as intimate companion, with Svarūpa Dāmodar, of the last phase of the great life. Sanātana and Rūpa, also, as well as others, had had close relations with Chaitanya. This biography, therefore, was based on the first-hand knowledge of various disciples, and reflects the intimate experience of those who knew him best.

We are told that Kṛishṇa Dās first asked permission to write from the author of the *Chaitanya Bhāgavata*, intending to make his work supplementary only to that biography. But his purpose soon widened. The work is not only a fuller treatment of Chaitanya's life than anything else produced; it is also a treatise on theology and devotion. Its exposition of the great doctrines of the sect give it assured philosophical standing, while its record of events, its descriptions of people, places and customs, make it of historical value beyond its sectarian usage. It is a huge work, containing more than 15,000 ślokas, or couplets, and divided, like its predecessor, into three parts, līlās or *khaṇḍas*, of which the first (*ādi līlā*) treats of the boyhood and pre-sannyāsī period, the second (*madhyā līlā*) records the active period of travel, and the third (*anta līla*) tells the story of the more passive and final years at Purī.

It is written in Bengali of a hybrid sort, and is all in verse. The author's long life far from Bengal did not make his use of the vernacular a well of style, pure and undefiled. It is full of Hindī and long Sanskrit terms. Its great learning is evidenced by the array of Sanskrit authorities quoted, a partial list of which, given in the

History of Bengali Language and Literature, runs to sixty names.[1] Indeed, for its exposition of Vaishṇava philosophy, the whole field of Sanskrit literature and philosophy is laid under tribute. So full is its treatment of bhakti, indeed, that the older Brindāban Fathers are said to have been somewhat opposed to its publication, on the ground that such a scholarly work in the vernacular would lead devotees to neglect the authoritative Sanskrit works on bhakti.

The manuscript of this work is kept in one of the Brindāban temples and worshipped as a relic. Among the Vaishṇavas of Bengal it is held in utmost reverence, and is counted second only to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in sanctity. Among the more ignorant, it is actually worshipped. From the standpoint of the historian, we are told that "in spite of its epic length, prolixity and repetitions, it is a masterpiece of early Bengali literature."[2] Also that it has no parallel in the whole of Bengali literature.[3]

The so-called fourth biography, *Chaitanya Maṅgala*, hardly deserves the name. It is the work of Lochan Das, and is said to have been written when the author was only fourteen years of age. The date given is about 1575. It is a work of poetical charm in which the author's imagination has embroidered with his own fancy the facts of the saint's life. The first part is described as a free translation of Murāri Gupta's Sanskrit *Kaṛchā*. It is full of supernaturalism, which partly accounts for its popularity. It is principally valued and used by professional singers, because of its lyrical qualities. The original MS. is still preserved in the home of one of these singers.[4] The author is also known for his Bengali songs.

That there were still other biographical works of the first generation after Chaitanya dealing with his life is indicated by a statement, in Jayānanda's *Chaitanya Maṅgala*, giving the names of several writers who had

[1] p. 481, note. [2] *C.L.T.*, vi. [3] *V.L.*, p. 62.
[4] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 495.

written such narratives. No trace of these works, however, has been found.[1]

We must now consider another work which claims to be the very first of the biographical accounts of Chaitanya written in Bengali. It is the *Kaṛchā* by Govinda Dās, known as Karmakār, the blacksmith, because of his caste. This work purports to be the notes of an uneducated man who ran away from a quarrelsome wife and took service in Chaitanya's home, where he served for more than a year, before Chaitanya became a sannyāsī. He accompanied Chaitanya in his two years of wandering through the south and in the Deccan, keeping notes all the while, but secretly for fear of his master's displeasure. His records cease with Chaitanya's return to Purī. Dr. Sen, in his history, gives to Govinda Karmakār a place of honour as "one of the most authentic biographers of Chaitanya," and believes his notes to be a fresh contemporary record, unbiased by the sectarian feeling that is found in the later orthodox works.[2] The principal fact upon which he seems to base his appreciation is that the notes portray Chaitanya as worshipping at all shrines on his travels, regardless of their sectarian character. This, however, is true of the *Charitāmṛita*, the most orthodox work of all. Many references can be found, for example, describing Chaitanya's visit to Śaivite shrines.

Most Vaishṇava scholars unite in maintaining this *Kaṛchā* to be a forgery. Their reasons are as follows. (1) The language is modern Bengali. (2) The sentiments put in Chaitanya's mouth are not in keeping with the teaching ascribed to him elsewhere. The philosophy is different from all other works. (3) There is no mention of this work anywhere in the authoritative literature of the movement. In Jayānanda's *Chaitanya Maṅgal* a Govinda Karmakār is mentioned, but it is not stated that he accompanied Chaitanya. (4) Grotesque mistakes abound in it, such as describing Chaitanya's hair as coiled and matted, though Chaitanya was always

[1] *V.L.*, p. 82. [2] *H.B.L.L.*, pp. 443, 463.

shaven, as required by the rule of his order of sannyāsīs. The author says he became a sannyāsī when Chaitanya did, in spite of the fact that he was a Śūdra, and therefore inadmissible; and there was no system of bhek at that time by which such could adopt the ascetic life. (5) Chaitanya is continually pictured as conversing with women, both good and bad, whereas his clear teaching in all other works is that a sannyāsī must have no contact whatever with women.[1] (6) No manuscript of this work has ever been produced for examination.

It is impossible for an outsider to pronounce judgment in such a matter. However, the facts seem to cast very considerable doubt upon the authenticity of these Notes. It is significant that a modern historical scholar like Professor Jadunath Sarkar, in the introduction to his translation of the Madhyā līlā of the *Chaitanya Charitāmṛita*, makes no mention of this *Karchā* among the biographical works in old Bengali.

Although not strictly biographical in form, the works of a celebrated writer, named Paramānanda Sen, should be included here. He is best known by his poetical title of Kavikarṇapūra. He was only a child when Chaitanya died, but he had seen the saint and tradition associates his poetic gifts with that childhood contact. The father of the poet was a well-known physician and a devoted follower of Chaitanya. He figures in the records most prominently as the organiser and leader of the annual pilgrimage of the Bengal disciples to Purī. Kavikarṇapūra's works were written in Sanskrit, the best known being a poem, *Charita*, and a drama, the *Chaitanya Chandrodaya Nāṭaka*. These works dealt with the life and times of Chaitanya and the movement that followed. They were especially renowned for their poetic beauty, and were widely quoted in subsequent works. The author, as well as his father, wrote songs in Bengali which have found a place in the hymnology of the sect.

[1] Even the wooden figure of a woman, a statue, is dangerous. *Ch.Ch.*, III, ii, p. 483.

So far we have been concerned only with the literature of Chaitanya's life. This is by far the most important, and the only part that has any real claim to literature. There is, however, considerable other biographical material which should be mentioned at least, and which must be taken into account in any just estimate of the enormous literary output of the sect. It is only natural to find that the other prominent figures associated with Chaitanya, especially the two apostles, Nityānanda and Advaita, should have been made the subject of much writing of a biographical character. Of Nityānanda, whose influence was so paramount in the sect's development, strangely enough we find no standard biography. Accounts of his life are to be found in practically all Vaishṇava historical works, a fact which may explain the lack. Even the *Chaitanya Bhāgavata*, in its later sections, is more concerned with Nityānanda's life than with Chaitanya's. Five works dealing with Advaita's life are listed in Dr. Sen's History. Three of these are more or less contemporary works, the best-known being the *Advaita Prakāśa*, by Īshan Nāgara, and the *Advaita Maṅgala*, by Hari Charan Dās. Practically every well-known follower of Chaitanya became the founder of a Gosvāmī family, and had his life written by some disciple. But these works are partisan and do not figure in the literature of the sect. The lives of the saints and leaders of a later generation are enshrined in the historical works that treat of that period.

Historical

These historical works just mentioned are really very largely biographical in nature. They are mostly concerned with leaders in the revival of enthusiasm that marked the sect two generations after Chaitanya. The story of the three men most revered, Śrīnivāsa, Narottama and Śyāmānanda, has been told as part of the history of the sect. It was the power of their influence that gave rise to the works we are about to describe. As Dr. Sen says:

These men helped the further development of the Vaishṇava creed in Bengal. Their great sacrifices, asceticism, scholarship and faith made them the central figures of the age that succeeded that of darkness and stupor caused by the *tirodhana*—the passing away of Chaitanya from this world. Their mystic visions, the romance of their lives, which cast a spell over the wicked and innocent alike, and their zeal and enthusiasm in propagating the creed of their faith, have been the subject of many illustrious memoirs and poetical songs, which once more sprang like a rich harvest in the field of the Vaishṇava literature.[1]

These works are truly historical, in that they throw a flood of light upon the circumstances of the Vaishṇava revival, its methods, its extent and its contagion, while setting forth in living and vivid outline the figures of leading actors in the scene. Some of these works are clearly contemporary records. They are full of the atmosphere and detail of personal experience and knowledge, such as descriptions of great festivals, the founding of shrines, learned discussions on the doctrines of the faith and debates that became historic.

Probably the earliest of these works is the *Prema-vilāsa*, by Nityānanda Dās. Its date is about 1640-50. The author was himself a Vaishṇava scholar who had studied under the famous son of Nityānanda, Vīrabhadra. He was a friend of Śrīnivāsa also, and writes as an observer of the men and events which he records. He was evidently a man of standing in the community, as he acted as guide to Jahnavī, the widow of Nityānanda, on her tour to Brindāban. Besides the accounts of the great ascetics mentioned, this work gives us much information about the work of Vīrabhadra, at whose instigation it was undertaken. The leadership of this man was of a very different character. We have already, in the historical section, made clear the significance of his influence, not only in letting in the flood that wrought deterioration in the sect, but also in consolidating, as it were, the power of his father and the family prestige, that has continued unimpaired to the present. One of the many narratives of great interest and importance, from a historical standpoint, in the

[1] *V.L.*, p. 84.

Premavilāsa, is the graphic story of the famous robbery of the Brindāban manuscripts. The only copies of several very important Vaishṇava works, including the great *Charitāmṛita* itself, were dispatched from Brindāban to Bengal for dissemination there, under the care of three young scholar ascetics, about 1600, after they had completed their studies under the Brindāban Gosvāmīs. On the way they were robbed of their treasure. When this word reached Brindāban, the blow was fatal to the aged Kṛishṇa Dās Kavirāj, who expired on receipt of the news. The manuscripts were eventually recovered, and the robber chieftain became an important Vaishṇava ruler of the period.

This work has probably suffered from interpolation, as is true of many of these later Vaishṇava works. Dr. Sen believes the printed work to be untrustworthy as regards several of the last chapters, but is convinced by the examination of many manuscript copies that the body of the work is authentic.[1] Some idea of the use made of these works may be gained through the fact that 500 copies of the *Premavilāsa* were made and circulated throughout the Vaishṇava community. For the literary qualities of the work let Mr. Sen speak:[2]

> The *Premavilāsa*, though written in verse, is prosaic in its spirit and in its style. Nowhere in this work is there any touch of poetical sentiment. Facts are put forward in a simple and unassuming manner. The great merit of the book consists in its brevity and power of condensing and arranging facts. As the author gives accounts mostly from first-hand knowledge, the descriptions are characterised by a vividness of detail, which excites curiosity and does not oppress the reader with that feeling of weariness which so often confronts him in perusing some of the laboured Vaishṇava biographies of a later period.

The Karṇānanda, by Jadunandana Dās, belongs to the same period, and was written at much the same time as the *Premavilāsa*. The author seems to have been a disciple of Hemalatā Devī, the able and cultured daughter of Śrīnivāsa Āchārya, one of the famous trio of whom these books tell. We are told that the book was written at her command and received its name

[1] *V.L.*, p. 169. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

from her. It deals with the same events and figures treated by the *Premavilāsa*, but its viewpoint is somewhat different and its command of style and poetic phrase is much superior. Its interest in theology gives it importance as throwing light on the development of doctrine in the sect. The *parakīya* teaching, for instance, which had so much influence in the sect, receives much consideration in this work; and we learn from it that Śrīnivāsa himself was an upholder of this doctrine.

Jadunandana was something of a Sanskrit scholar, and he is perhaps equally well known among Vaishṇavas for his translations of works of the Brindāban saints. He also contributed many songs to the pada[1] collections.

The *Rasika Maṅgala*, by Gopīvallabha Dās, is perhaps the next work of any interest in order of time. Its chief claim to importance is that it deals with the spread of the sect in Orissa, and gives valuable information about the winning of that area. It is mainly an account of the labours of Śyāmānanda, and particularly of his aristocratic disciple, Rasika Murāri. The work dates from the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

Coming now to the *Bhaktiratnākara*, we have to deal with a famous work among the Vaishṇavas. Its date is considerably later than the other narratives we have discussed. It was written about the second or third decade of the eighteenth century; its survey covers the development of the movement from Chaitanya's time until the end of the seventeenth century. Its author, Narahari Chakravartī, was a man of scholarly training, having studied the great Sanskrit texts at Brindāban. He was likewise an ascetic after the original Brindāban ideal, living for years in the shrines of the place, and actually serving for a period of years as cook in the Govindjī temple there.

The work is a voluminous one, full of references to Sanskrit authorities, and quoting freely from the orthodox biographies of Chaitanya. Its fifteen chapters cover a wide range, but deal, for the most part, with

[1] A lyric poem.

the seventeenth century development treated by the preceding works. It does not omit theology even, for one chapter is devoted to a learned résumé of the treatises of the master theologians on the psychology of love. From a historical point of view, it is inferior to the earlier *Premavilāsa*, as it lacks the contemporary knowledge, and reflects the deifying tendencies of a later generation. In the estimation of the Vaishṇavas it ranks next to the *Charitāmṛita* of Kṛishṇa Dās.

The *Narottama Vilāsa* and the *Anurāgāvali* are well known works by the same author, treating of the lives of Narottama and other saints.

Mention should be made also of the *Vaṁśiśikshā*, by Purushottama Siddhānta Vagīsa, written early in the eighteenth century. It throws interesting light on Chaitanya, but mainly treats of the life of Vaṁśivadana, Navadvīp friend and disciple of Chaitanya. Discussions between the two on Vaishṇava doctrines are recorded here. The golden image of Chaitanya, now worshipped at Navadvīp with such reverence, was made by Vaṁśīvadana for Vishṇupriyā's comfort.

This work has recently been republished, with an introduction, and edited by Professor Bhāgavata Kumār Gosvāmī, Śāstrī, Ph.D., of Hugli College, a lineal descendant of Vamśīvadana.

Theological and Ritual

We have more than once already indicated the peculiar position of authority held by the Brindāban Gosvāmīs because of their scholarship and devotion. Men of great gifts, inspired and ennobled by their devotion to Chaitanya, they dedicated their intellectual energies to the service and exaltation of their faith. The most minute and laborious scholarship was blended in them with the devotion of the saint. They were truly scholars, first of all, having spent long years in patient mastery of Sanskrit grammar, logic and philosophy, but the master motive that used this immense learning was the love of bhakti, the devotion of the heart to the service of Kṛishṇa, as it

had captivated their hearts forever in the life of Chaitanya. Throughout long lives, therefore, the intellectual powers of these scholar ascetics were consecrated to the theological tasks of their faith. For them something new had been added to the bhakti cult in Chaitanya's life. They set themselves, therefore, to the task of a re-statement of the bhakti philosophy in the light of that life. Fresh commentaries on the bhakti śāstras were required, and the elaboration of ritual codes for the detailed guidance of worshippers in the new sect. The creation of a new theology was involved, and an elaborate exposition of that theology in all the realms of Sanskrit learning. Thus we find these scholars writing on grammar, logic, rhetoric and drama, but always in the light of their theology and with a view to its more complete exposition. Like the Schoolmen of Europe, their theology was to them the queen of the sciences; to it all knowledge was tributary, and out of it were the issues of life.

The enumeration of the principal works of the sect in theology and ritual can hardly be more than a catalogue of names, but it will at least serve to give the reader some indication of the immense industry of these men, and can hardly fail to impress him with a sense of the tremendous devotion inspired in their lives that could bring forth so great a result. It seems preferable to group each author's works together rather than to list them all in exact chronological sequence. Only those of importance are given.

Rūpa. Of Rūpa's many works, all in Sanskrit, the two most important theologically are the *Bhaktirasāmṛitasindhu* and the *Ujjvalanīlamaṇi.* The first is an exhaustive treatise on bhakti, surveying the whole of the literature of Vaishṇavism up to his day. It is an elaborate analysis of the religious feelings in the terms of the love philosophy of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult. The second, while ostensibly treating of rhetoric, is in reality also a work on bhakti. In this work is to be found the elaborate classification of the emotions and moods of love, which has given the Chaitanya

theologians pre-eminence as specialists in this regard. The *Bhāgavatāmṛitam* is a selection of stories from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* The *Gaṇadveśadīpikā* is an exposition of that peculiar phase of the sect's theology which sees in its great saints and leaders incarnations of the gopīs with whom Kṛishṇa dallied. The *Mathurā-māhātmya*, while scarcely a work on theology, may be mentioned here. It is a full description of the country round about Mathurā, the modern Muttra, which is the holy land of the Vaishṇava, glorified by its connection with Kṛishṇa.

Sanātana. The *Haribhaktivilāsa* is Sanātana's masterpiece. It is a huge work on ritual and is the authority for the sect. It was written, according to the *Charitāmṛita*, at the express command of Chaitanya, and on the basis of the outline suggested by him. It is a work of great erudition, as every rule is buttressed by reference to ancient authority. It provides the code of all Vaishṇava ceremonial, the whole ritual of temples, and outlines the duties of householders as well as sannyāsīs. It may be said, however, to deal with the higher phases of Vaishṇava worship rather than with the daily worship of the individual. This work has usually been credited to Gopāl Bhaṭṭa, another of the Brindāban Gosvāmīs, but mistakenly so. Sanātana's defection from Hinduism to Islam, before he came under Chaitanya's influence, was never forgotten by the Hindu community. In orthodox eyes he was forever an outcaste. It was in order that this prejudice might not hinder the use of his book that his name was never officially associated with it. But the record in the *Charitāmṛita* and the testimony of Jīva Gosvāmī, the nephew of Rūpa and Sanātana, make his authorship clear. The *Dikprakāśikā* is a commentary on the larger work, written by Sanātana himself. In the field of theology Sanātana's great work is a commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, known as the *Vaishṇava-toshiṇī.* He also wrote a *Bhāgavatāmṛitam*, with commentaries on the work.

Jīva. The nephew of Rūpa and Sanātana, Jīva was probably the greatest theologian of the Brindāban

group. His chief work is the *Satsandarbha*, on philosophy, surveying the whole philosophical basis of Vaishṇavism with great learning and power. This work served for a long time instead of a sectarian *bhāshya* on the Vedānta Sūtras, and has always been held in great authority. The *Laghutoshiṇī* is a commentary on the *Vaishṇava-toshiṇī* of Sanātana; and the *Durgama Saṅgamaṇi* a commentary on Rūpa's *Bhaktirasāmṛitasindhu*. He also wrote commentaries on the two favourite works which Chaitanya found in his travels, the *Brahma Saṁhitā* and the *Kṛishṇakarṇāmṛita*. A work on ritual by Jīva is the *Kṛishṇārchaṇadīpikā*, dealing with the worship of Kṛishṇa. As many as twenty-five Sanskrit works are ascribed to Jīva.

Raghunātha Dās. In his *Chaitanya and His Companions*, Dr. Sen lists 13 Sanskrit works written by this man, and says there are 28 altogether. This ascetic was popularly known as "Dās Gosvāmī," and was one of the saintliest in the Brindāban circle. His works treat more of the mystical side of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa worship, but they do not seem to have attained the prominence of those mentioned above.

Gopāl Bhaṭṭa. As we have noted, this man's name has been associated with Sanātana's *Haribhaktivilāsa*. There is some ground for this other than has been mentioned, in that Gopāl Bhaṭṭa did enlarge upon Sanātana's work and added some illustrations of his own. No other work of importance is ascribed to him.

Kṛishṇa Dās Kavirāj. Besides the Kavirāj's *magnum opus* on the life of Chaitanya, he produced many other works in Sanskrit and Bengali, some of which are held in high esteem. Especially well known is the *Govindalīlāmṛita*,[1] on the amours of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, translated into Bengali by the author of *Karṇānanda*. The *Saraṅgaraṅgadā* is a commentary on Bilvamaṅgala's

[1] This work is of interest for its relation to the unsavoury secret forms of Vaishṇava worship in Bengal. One śloka in this work represents Kṛishṇa as calling Rādhā his guru. From this certain groups seek to derive authority for their secret practices, in which the worship of young women is prominent.

Kṛishṇakarṇāmṛita, the work so beloved of Chaitanya, and the *Premaratnāvali* is a treatise on bhakti theology.

A small and popular work on theology, written in Bengali during the second great period of the sect, is the *Premabhakti Chandrikā*, by the revered Narottama. Both because of its saintly author and its subject matter this work is greatly valued by Vaishṇavas.

Of a later generation two names stand out. At the beginning of the eighteenth century Baladeva Vidyābhūshaṇa wrote the *Govinda Bhāshya* on the *Vedānta Sūtras*, to meet the need for a sectarian bhāshya which had been felt for a long time. This has been much used; but a shorter work by the same author, the *Prameya Ratnāvali*, is also popular. The last theological work of importance produced in the sect was the commentary on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, by Viśvanātha Chakravartī, written about 1704. It is held in high regard among Vaishṇavas as an authoritative exposition of their faith. It rejects the svakīya as opposed to the parakīya doctrine, and strongly upholds the latter, *i.e.* that the gopīs of Brindāban were the mistresses of Kṛishṇa and not his wives.

The above works represent the better-known productions of the sect. They do not by any means exhaust its theological writing. In the *History of Bengali Language and Literature* we find a list of 40 briefer theological works by Vaishṇava authors, exclusive of the considerable theological writing advocating the Sahajiyā doctrines.

Before closing the list, mention should be made of certain humbler works which play a considerable part in the lives of the rank and file among the Bengal Vaishṇavas. The *Saṅskāradīpikā* is a manual on ritual of unknown authorship, which sets forth the rules as followed in most ākhṛās. It is drawn from the *Haribhaktivilāsa*, but is adapted to the types of Vaishṇava life that came into existence after that great authority was written. A still humbler work, but widely used, is the *Bhogmālāvivaraṇa*, a collection of rules for worship, written in Sanskrit. It is published

at the Bartollah presses in Calcutta in the very cheapest form.

These same Bartollah presses are the source of a stream of popular works on theology and the cultivation of bhakti. They are printed very cheaply and sell for a few annas each. They are usually based on the standard works of the sect, and serve as popular expositions of its distinctive doctrines. Many of them are manuals of worship or aids to devotion, or stories of the great bhaktas of the sect, drawn from the historical works. Much of this popular printing is due to the fact that each family or house of Gosvāmīs tends to produce manuals, etc., edited with a view to enhance the glory of that particular line and those from whom it sprang.

All this cheap printing performs a useful purpose, in view of the extreme poverty of the peasants of India. It makes possible their sharing in some measure in the treasures of their religious heritage. Along with these popular pamphlets, it should be understood, the standard works themselves are to be had in cheapest form, often execrably printed, but thus brought within reach of the common people.

Drama

Among the voluminous works of Rūpa Gosvāmī, two dramas of note stand out from the heavy mass of theology and philosophy, They are known as the *Vidagdha-Mādhava* and the *Lalita-Mādhava.* The skeleton of these plays was read to Chaitanya himself at Purī, and he advised quite freely as to their development, causing the author to change his plan. They deal with the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa episodes at Brindāban. We are assured that, despite the apparent sensuousness of these dramas, their theme is spiritual love. A third drama by Rūpa, called *Dānakelī Kaumudī*, also treats of the same theme. These works rank high among the Sanskrit productions of the sixteenth century.

Perhaps we should include here a work of Rāmānanda Rāy, Chaitanya's accomplished friend in the service of the king of Orissa. This man, among his other interests,

was the author of a drama named *Jagannātha Vallabha*, which was one of the few things read to Chaitanya by his disciples during the years of the Purī sojourn.

Doubtless the best-known drama produced in the sect was the *Chaitanya Chandrodaya Nāṭaka*, written in Sanskrit in Bengal by the distinguished poet Kavikarṇapūra. This was something like the mediæval mystery plays of Europe, with virtues and vices personified, and evil conditions portrayed. Chaitanya is set forth in this work as a saviour.

Hymnology

By far the greater part of the Vaishṇava literature produced in Bengal falls under the head of what we should call religious lyrics, or hymns. This poetry of the movement is enormous in extent; undoubtedly it is one of the sect's chief contributions to Bengali literature. Great claims are made for its beauty and charm. Here, manifestly, a non-Bengali, and particularly a Westerner, is ruled out as a judge.[1] But perhaps a word of comment on general grounds is permissible. It would seem that much of this poetry is doomed to mediocrity, because of the severe restrictions laid upon poetic genius by the nature of these songs. They are all limited to the Kṛishṇa legend as it is set forth in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other Vaishṇava scriptures, and most of them are confined to certain episodes in that legend. Therefore the action is strictly limited, the sentiments are all prescribed, the very metaphors and figures of speech are stereotyped. Over and over again, a thousand times, the poets traverse this ground, with the result that imitation and monotony is inevitable. The best of the singers used their limited material in masterly fashion; but it is doubtful how far truly great poetry may be expected under such circumstances.

[1] Appreciation of the Rādhā songs from a Western point of view, with a group of them done into English verse, will be found in a recent publication of the Oxford Press, *Vaishṇava Lyrics*, by S. N. Kumār, N. L. Datta and J. A. Chapman.

It cannot be said that the Chaitanya movement created the Vaishṇava pada (song). The precursors of the Chaitanya singers are to be found in the early Vaishṇava poets of Bengal and Behar. Jayadeva, the famous twelfth century author of the Sanskrit *Gīta-govind*, whose melodious love verse is the earliest surviving Rādhā-Kṛishṇa poetry, and Chaṇḍī Dās and Vidyāpati, of the fifteenth century, are the great names. They all wrote of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa. Here, then, was a Vaishṇava tradition and a lyric model clearly established before Chaitanya's day. When the religious revival that owed its life to Chaitanya burst forth, and began to spread in tides of emotion across Bengal, its poetic expression naturally followed the path marked out by earlier singers. In other words, the Vaishṇavas of Chaitanya's following found a literary vehicle ready to hand when their new religious experience drove them to song.

But they did not leave the pada as they found it. Into it they poured their very hearts, and for two centuries the flow of music did not cease. In the process the Vaishṇava pada became distinctively an expression of the Chaitanya movement. It was moulded to new uses and coloured by the new tide of life sweeping through it. Although a sectarian expression, it ministered to the life of all, and gave music new forms and meaning and larger entrance into the common life of the people. The various collections of these padas, each of them numbering many hundreds of songs, bear testimony to the striking lyric expression of the Chaitanya movement.

The classification of these songs is both chronological and sentimental. The whole material of the legend is dramatised and divided into periods, each period being treated fully in song. These periods are roughly as follows:

1. The Gopāla[1] songs, in praise of the childhood of Kṛishṇa.

[1] Cowherd, a name of Kṛishṇa. Bālagopāla is the name of the image of the child Kṛishṇa.

2. The Goshṭha[1] songs, glorifying the cowherd boy, full of marvellous exploits, loved and revered alike by the fun-loving boys and the anxious mother. These songs, again, are variously subdivided.

3. The Gopī-līlā cycle, songs of Kṛishṇa's dalliance with the milkmaids, among whom Rādhā is the central figure.

4. The Māthura songs of bereavement and anguish, arising out of Kṛishṇa's departure from Mathurā to go to Dwārkā.

The great mass of the songs, however, are devoted to the amours of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa. This is the all-absorbing theme that never seems to fail in interest. These songs fall under somewhat different categories. Here the classification is an emotional one, by which the songs are grouped according to the phase or stage of love's emotion with which they deal. The main divisions of this classification are :

1. *Pūrva Rāg*, the dawn of love. In this group are all the songs descriptive of the first effects upon Rādhā of the divine passion after her first sight of Kṛishṇa.

2. *Dautya*, the message of love. This is the state of love conscious of itself and taking every means at hand for covert expression of its passion.

3. *Abhisāra*, stealing forth in secret. This is a favourite theme with the Vaishṇava singers, and is dealt with at length.

4. *Sambhoga-Mīlana*, the secret meeting. Here are grouped the numberless songs treating of the dalliance in the groves of Brindāban and the amorous play between Kṛishṇa and Rādhā together with the gopīs.

5. *Māthura*, separation, as above.

6. *Bhāva-Sanmīlana*, union in spirit. The songs of this group express the effort to rise above bodily separation and realise oneness in spirit with the beloved. Many of these songs, slightly altered, have had a devotional use outside of Vaishṇava circles, as in the Brahmo Samaj.

[1] Cow pen or pasture.

In the main this is the classification to which all the Vaishṇava padas conform. Within these principal groups there are other divisions and minute sub-divisions, according to the rules of rhetoric by which fine grades of feeling are discriminated from one another and analyzed with great subtlety. Each of these numerous sub-divisions is illustrated by many songs. We have noted elsewhere that as many as 360 of these fine shades of love's emotions have been described by the theologians of the sect.

The outstanding fact about these songs of the Vaishṇavas, according to their interpreters, is that they are more than lyric poetry. They are that indeed, and their charm has been sufficient to make them a potent influence in Bengali literature. But their significance is largely missed, so we are told, if their claim to be more than what they seem is not recognised. For to these interpreters, as well as to the Vaishṇava devotee, they are essentially mystical and religious, the outpouring of devout hearts in adoration and spiritual aspiration. However sensuous they may appear, however glowing their description of physical passion, however evident may seem their taste for erotic pleasure, these things are held to be but the ardour of the soul's thirst for God, the effort to express the spirit's unappeasable longing for the divine by means of the burning language of the senses. The whole of the literature connected with the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa legends has been allegorized so persistently and completely as to have become a dogma. The sensuous garb, we are told, "is the mere language of human love, without taking recourse to which the spiritual joy cannot be conveyed to ordinary people." We are to accept it on authority that the great mass of the Vaishṇava padas are mystic expressions of the religious consciousness. As with all dogmas, however, the truth refuses to be so confined. It is simply asking too much of the general reader to accept the sweeping statement, that, while dealing so largely with physical passions as these poems admittedly do, they have "always a door open

heavenwards.'"[1] The plain truth is that many of these poems, especially of the earlier period, while highly artistic, are gross and sensual in spirit and treatment, and suggest nothing but erotic interest. There is nothing to be gained in attempting to clothe songs of sex in celestial garb, or in hiding their frank naturalism under the guise of spirituality. A healthy critical standard that applies generally accepted literary tests without fear or favour is a far more salutary method, and one more likely to come at the truth.[2]

No doubt there were many among the *pada-karttās* (masters of song) for whom their songs were in truth expressions of religious feeling. The nobler spirits among the Vaishṇavas certainly were in earnest in their acceptance of the Brindāban stories, whether as literal fact or as allegory, and, however difficult it may seem to minds otherwise trained, we have no right to impugn the sincerity with which they sought the things of the spirit by such means. There surely is a world of difference, however, between such a statement about the best minds of the sect and the throwing of a mantle of spirituality over all who, through several centuries, have sung of themes as provocative of fleshly treatment as those of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa legends.

The influence of Chaitanya worked a marked change in the padas. His own life became the theme that inspired the poets, and soon there were large numbers of songs concerned with him and his disciples alone. Furthermore, there developed a tendency to interpret the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa stories in the light of Chaitanya's life; in his passionate bhakti his followers saw the reality of that which they had sought to extract by allegory from the story of Rādhā. Out of these influences rose the *Gaurachandrikā*, the very considerable body of song which treats of Chaitanya, and which is used invariably in all kīrtans to precede the singing of the songs of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa. Their function is interpretative; they set the pitch, as it were, for the

[1] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 543.
[2] See B. K. Sarkar, *Love in Hindu Literature*, on this point.

music to follow; they give the key to the meaning of the whole performance and make clear its motive.

In the midst of the loud music of tambourine and the shrill clang of cymbals, the Gaurachandrikā sounded the keynote of a new phase of Vaishṇavism, in which the incidents of Chaitanya's life illustrated in a concrete form the high spiritual philosophy of the sect.

In fact, his life is constantly before those singers who sing of the love of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa, and it is indispensable that they should first sing the Gaurachandrikā, . . . before they are permitted to introduce similiar songs relating to Rādhā-Kṛishṇa love. These Gaurachandrikā are, in fact, reminders to the audience that the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa love should bear to them a spiritual meaning, that though some time presented in a sensual garb, it actually belongs to a super-sensuous plane.[1]

It is worth noting that the influence of Chaitanya's life of bhakti upon the whole of Vaishṇava song served to purify the stream somewhat. The grosser and more distinctly sensual forms were subordinated to those which could more readily respond to a spiritual interpretation. So far does this interpretation of Rādhā-love by the emotions of Chaitanya go, that Rādhā often seems to become to the poets little more than a name for the ecstasies and trances of Chaitanya. So much so, says Dr. Sen, that

To those versed in Chaitanya literature, Rādhā, the princess portrayed in the songs, will pass away, and the personality of a handsome Brāhman youth, maddened by God's love, bewailing his separation from Kṛishṇa and holding communion in a trance with the clouds of heaven, the trees of the woods, and the waves of the Jumna, as though they were real friends who could tell him of the God he sought for, will appear as the only reality, investing the songs with the significance and beauty of a higher plane.[2]

The number of the Vaishṇava singers is almost legion. Dr. Sen gives a list of 159 poets whose padas he has himself collected. The known songs of these writers make a total of 4,600. It is almost certain that there are many more songs in manuscript which have never been collected, and also that others have been handed down orally and continue in popular use, although never written down.

[1] *C.C.*, pp. 2, 178. [2] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 542.

Of these poets we can only name a few. Govinda Dās, of the generation following Chaitanya, seems to have been the leading singer of the sect. He did not become a Vaishṇava until middle age, when he came under the influence of Śrīnivāsa, but his late start did not seem to hinder his poetic output. His songs number well towards 500. He modelled his songs upon those of Vidyāpati, and wrote in an unspoken dialect, called Brajbuli, made up of Maithilī and Bengali mixed, probably in imitation of his master. Contemporary with him were Balarāma Dās and Jñāna Dās, second only to Govinda in popularity, although not so prolific in song. Of those who sang chiefly of Chaitanya, two names stand out pre-eminently, those of Narahari Sarkār and Vāsudeva Ghosh. These men were both personal friends and disciples of Chaitanya. Narahari was the first disciple to compose songs about Chaitanya in the vernacular, the language of the people ; he is, therefore, the pioneer of the immense hymnology treating of Chaitanya. His example inspired his friend, Vāsudeva, whose passionate songs about Chaitanya are acknowledged to be the best, and are in constant use in the collections of Gaurachandrikā mentioned above.

Various collections of the Vaishṇava songs have been made through the centuries. The most extensive was made in the sixteenth century, and was said to have contained 15,000 songs. Little is known of this huge collection, except that a manuscript copy is known to have been in existence comparatively recently. The best known is the *Padakalpataru* by Vaishṇava Dās, compiled early in the eighteenth century. It contains more than 3,000 songs, and is carefully arranged in sections and sub-divisions according to the classifications already described.[1]

[1] For a full treatment of the Vaishṇava singers the reader is referred to Dr. Sen's voluminous *History of Bengali Literature* and his *Vaishṇava Literature*, where, in loving appreciation, he deals at length with this interesting period.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECT AS IT IS TO-DAY: ITS ORDERS

It is no easy task to describe the Chaitanyas as a sect to-day. By the very use of the term we have laid ourselves open to misunderstanding. It implies a more or less clear assumption: the assumption of a distinct body, larger or smaller, united by common practices and beliefs, and marked by similar characteristics wherever found, which set them off sharply from those who belong to different cults. Much of this does apply to the Chaitanyas to-day in a general fashion, but there is also evident a lack of definiteness in their demarcation which does not fit the idea of a sect. They seem to merge with the mass of the population about them, in a way that is highly disconcerting to the desire for sharp differentiation and classification. There is no clearly defined cult binding on the whole sect, organising its life as a homogeneous unit. On the contrary, there is a vagueness about it all, an utter absence of anything approaching sectarian organisation, an ignorance and lack of leadership, an indefiniteness of idea and practice that almost warrant the conclusion that the use of the term "sect" is altogether a misnomer.

Notwithstanding this, the word has been retained. However lacking in certain sectarian respects, we are dealing here with a common culture and tradition of wide influence, and sufficiently homogeneous in the life and practice developed by it to warrant its being treated as a sect. Our purpose in the two succeeding chapters is to give as clear an idea as possible of what actually characterises the life of the Chaitanya Vaishṇavas at the present time.

Like most of the sects, there are several clearly defined classes into which the adherents of the movement fall. Among the Chaitanyas there are four: (*a*) The *Gosvāmīs*, or gurus of the sect; (*b*) the *Grihasthas*, or householders; (*c*) the *Vairāgīs*, or ascetics; (*d*) the *Jāt-Vairāgīs*, or *Jāt Baishṭams* as they are commonly called, who are a householding class marked off from the second group by the fact of their having no caste standing. We shall take these in order, giving a somewhat extended treatment of the first and third groups.

A. The Gosvāmīs

The Gosvāmīs are the gurus of the sect and constitute its principal class.[1] The name, often written Gosāin, is common to all, or nearly all, the Vaishṇava sects. Its original meaning was "master of the cows," but the term now simply designates a religious preceptor. The basis of the supremacy and importance of this class is the *guru padāśraya* doctrine, held in common with many Hindu sects; a doctrine which exalts the guru into a position almost divine and insures for him a veneration abject and unqualified. The position of guru among the Chaitanyas is hereditary; so that a Gosvāmī family becomes a sort of closed corporation, possessing a vested interest which is passed on from generation to generation.

1. *Origin and Development.*

The Gosvāmī families owe their hereditary position to the circumstances of their origin. Most of these families, certainly the most important, are descended from the immediate disciples of Chaitanya. The traditional source of the apostolic succession was a hierarchy made up of the original six Gosvāmīs of Brindāban, eight *Kavirājas* (bards), and sixty-four *mahantas* (heads of monasteries). As the great majority of these worthies were honoured as celibates, it seems

[1] As a matter of fact, the mahants of ākhṛās and individual vairāgīs often have disciples and are looked upon as gurus. But, as a rule, they lack the standing of a Gosvāmī in performing this function.

a strange proceeding to ascribe to them the founding of the Gosvāmī lines. As a matter of fact, the leading Gosvāmī families are descendants of the two leaders of the sect, Chaitanya's right-hand men, Nityānanda and Advaita. The orthodox test of a Gosvāmī of the sect is that he be descended from a disciple of Chaitanya himself. There are numerous exceptions to this, however, as we shall see.

The descendants of Nityānanda have maintained the primacy in the sect gained by him down to the present day. Three distinct lines claim descent from Nityānanda: those living at Kardaha, near Barrackpore, the place where Nityānanda and his famous son resided and built temples; those of Goishpur, in the Maldah district; and those of Lata, in the Burdwan district. Members of this flourishing house are found all over Bengal. All three branches give different genealogies to substantiate their claims. In Bengal the Kardaha Gosvāmīs are in the ascendant, but at Brindāban the Lata line takes precedence. There they are the owners of the *Śiṅgaravata* maṭha, a Chaitanya shrine, and are known as the Śiṅgaravata Gosvāmīs. Some cast doubt on all these genealogies, on the ground that Nityānanda's son, Vīrabhadra, had no descendants. But however spurious the lineage may be, the fact remains that the Kardaha Gosvāmīs have the lion's share of the patronage of the sect, and are able to maintain themselves in wealth and ease. A source of considerable income is revealed by the fact that most of the public women of Calcutta are disciples of these Gosvāmīs. Often the property of these unfortunates is made over at death to their gurus, and this, in addition to the generous yearly fees received from them, makes no inconsiderable share of the income that flows into the coffers of these Gosvāmīs. The Nityānanda and Advaita Gosvāmīs are looked upon with more reverence than is accorded to any other Gosvāmī families. The lesser Gosvāmīs acknowledge members of these two groups as their own gurus. In this matter the Nityānanda Gosvāmīs hold the preeminence, for most of the Gosvāmī families of Bengal

owe some allegiance to Nityānanda as the organiser of the sect.

The descendants of Advaita have always been held as next in importance among the gurus of the sect. There are now many branches of this family. Śāntipur, in the Nadia district of Bengal, where Advaita lived, is still their centre, and they are known as the Śāntipur Gosvāmīs. True to the characteristics that distinguished the two leaders, their descendants have continued to exhibit sharp differences. The Śāntipur Gosvāmīs are more conservative and orthodox from the viewpoint of Hindu society than the Nityānanda Gosvāmīs, and they have refused to minister to, or admit into the sect, the lower castes and immoral elements of the population, who have traditionally found help at the hands of Nityānanda's descendants. Of late years, indeed, differences have developed among the Nityānanda Gosvāmīs themselves over the admittance of low castes, a minority being opposed to it.

A third line of importance is that of the Bāghnāpāṛa Gosvāmīs, who trace their descent from Vaṁśīvādana Chatterjee, known as Vaṁśī Dās, one of the few Brāhman disciples and followers of Chaitanya. Readers will remember it was to this disciple's care that Chaitanya committed his mother and wife on his departure from home. There are only two families in this house, so it is not an extensive body like the two others mentioned. Traditions of scholarship have always been maintained among them, a distinction by no means true of all Gosvāmīs. The late head of this house in Calcutta, Bepin Behari Gosvāmī, one of the last of the old order of Vaishṇava paṇḍits, died in 1919 at the ripe age of 71. His son, Bhāgavata Kumāra Gosvāmī Śāstrī, Ph.D., Professor in Hugli College, is now head of the family.

There are many other Gosvāmī families in Bengal and Orissa, and also at Brindāban, who derive their spiritual eminence from the possession of an ancestor either associated with Chaitanya or held in great esteem in the earlier days of the sect. One of the

most numerous of these is the Gadādhar group, round about Vikrampur in the Dacca district of Bengal. Gadādhar was one of the best known of Chaitanya's disciples. I am told that there are as many as forty-five families of this house now, representing 27 different branches. Of these branches, however, only six are considered of importance

The influential Gosvāmīs of Navadvīp, the sacred ground of the sect, are descendants of Sanātana Miśra, father of Vishṇupriyā, the second wife of Chaitanya. Curiously enough, they were not Vaishṇavas at all, but Śāktas, and continued so until brought into the Vaishṇava fold by the lucrative circumstances in which they found themselves, as possessors of sacred spots and shrines connected with the new cult. The Śrīkaṇḍa Gosvāmīs are descendants of Narahari Sarkār, a noted singer and close friend of Chaitanya. They are Vaidyas by caste, but have always had a considerable following of Brāhman disciples. The Gosvāmīs of Kheturi and Chakhuṇḍi, in Bengal, are descendants of Narottama and Śrīnivāsa, two of the famous trio of the seventeenth century revival.

In Orissa the leading Gosvāmīs derive from Rasika Murāri, the young rājā whose name is associated with that of Śyāmānanda in the winning of that area. In Brindāban the Chaitanya Gosvāmīs trace their lineage almost wholly to the descendants of relatives of the original six Gosvāmīs. There is a line of Bengali Gosvāmīs also in Jaipur, where the Rājā of Jaipur is a Vaishṇava. These Gosvāmīs are disciples of the Bāghnāpāṛa Gosvāmīs of Calcutta.

At first, as we have indicated, the only Gosvāmīs recognised as gurus of the sect were those descended from the actual companions and followers of Chaitanya, who were active in the propagation of the faith. This was the orthodox test. Exceptions were made in favour of the revered leaders of a later generation; for the honour paid to them was sufficient to raise their descendants to guruship. In later times, many more families laid claims to Gosvāmī honours and privileges, basing

their claims on descent from relatives or no more than disciples of original Gosvāmīs. This process has gone on, until to-day there are any number of Gosvāmīs in Bengal; and the process of setting up new and spurious lines is going on all the while; for there is no central authority in the sect and no means of safeguarding the doctrine of succession. The Gosvāmī order has come to represent successful exploitation as much as anything else. In Sylhet, a strongly Vaishṇava district, formerly in northern Bengal but now included in Assam, the two Gosvāmī families that have most disciples in the district are descended from two famous worthies, named Thakurabāni and Vaishṇava Roy, who were hardly more than local celebrities, although they claimed discipleship to Nityānanda and Advaita. It is a strange fact that those who can trace descent from Chaitanya's own family—his uncle's descendants are living in Sylhet to-day—do not rank as Gosvāmīs of importance.

2. *Functions and Relations.*

The chief functions of the Gosvāmī are those involved in the discharge of his duties as a guru. He presides over the initiation of the young and the introduction of new members into discipleship. The discharge of these duties calls for the regular visitation of disciples, usually once each year. Each Gosvāmī has a certain number of disciples resident over a varying extent of country. These disciples represent the inheritance received from his predecessor, usually a father, and may be added to according to the energy and ambition of the Gosvāmī. The annual visitation of disciples is something of an event, especially if the Gosvāmī is a man of position and his disciples are well-to-do. He travels in state, with Brāhman cook and vairāgī servants and attendants. At the home of a disciple he is received with every mark of honour. The inmates bow at his feet, taking the dust therefrom and placing it on their heads in the traditional mode of veneration. He is waited upon with great deference

and his feet are washed, the water being drunk by members of the family, unless their devotion has been infected somewhat by modern ideas. Feasting occupies no inconsiderable place in the programme of the visit. The disciple provides articles of food in quality according to his means; and the guru's cook prepares the meals. The food is first offered to Kṛishṇa and the remains left from the Gosvāmī's meal are distributed through the family as prasāda, after the fashion of food received in a temple from before the image. If youths of the household are ready for initiation, the Gosvāmī performs the ceremony and gives the mantra. This is given in secret, never to be revealed on pain of disaster. It is usually only a phrase embodying the name of Kṛishṇa, although it is supposed to express some formula of the sect. This is really the only thing that constitutes discipleship to a guru, the receipt of the mantra on initiation. His functions as a religious teacher are usually fulfilled by the relation of stories from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* or the *Charitāmṛita*, to which the whole household listens, the younger female members catching what they can from behind screens if allowed out of their secluded apartments. Seldom is the guru sufficiently versed in the scriptures to talk with educated men, and, as for systematic teaching or instruction of disciples, there is little or nothing of the kind given. The visit may last for several days or may be quite brief, depending very largely, one gathers, upon the opulence of the home. Upon departure the Gosvāmī receives gifts according to the financial standing of the disciple, a money payment accompanied by ornaments and choice articles of clothing, such as *dhotis* and *chādars*.[1] This annual gift of the disciple is called the *bārshi*.

In addition to this yearly visit, the Gosvāmī usually appears at weddings, and on other special occasions, in the homes of his disciples. On the occasion of a wedding, it is the rule that the father should present the

[1] A *dhoti* is a long cloth worn about the limbs; a *chādar* is worn over the shoulders shawl fashion.

Gosvāmī with cloth and money and beg his permission to give son or daughter, as it may be, in marriage. In the absence of the Gosvāmī, this seeking of permission is made in advance and the gift sent, or it is collected by the Gosvāmī's representive, or by himself at the annual visit. Similarly, on the occasion of special events in his own family he becomes the recipient of gifts from his disciples.

Most of the temples of the sect are owned by Gosvāmīs, and in connection with such establishments ākhṛās, for the housing of the ascetic members of the sect, are often found. In a general way this provision for the worship and care of the sect may be set down as a function of the Gosvāmīs.

In some cases they assume a judicial function over their disciples, much in the nature of a village *pañchāyat*. In case of trouble, acting either independently or on complaint being lodged, the Gosvāmī warns offenders and, if necessary, orders fines of from one to five rupees, according to the nature of the offence. The money thus secured is publicly spent.[1]

Some organisation is required for the administration of a Gosvāmī's affairs, especially if the list of his disciples is a long one. In some parts of Bengal it appears that Gosvāmīs divide their territory, and have agents to care for their interests. A district is divided into sections, called *bhabuk mahal*, and to each mahal is assigned two representatives, whose business it is to collect fees from disciples and to propagate the faith. These men are known as *faujdārs* and *chhaṛidārs*.[2] Of all fees collected they receive a fixed percentage. For initiation, marriage and death ceremonies the usual fee due to the Gosvāmī is Re. 1-6. Of this amount the faujdār receives four annas and the chhaṛidār two annas.[3]

[1] *Rajshahi Gazetteer*, p. 58.

[2] Literally, one who carries a stick as a sign of authority, *i.e.* a representative. Faujdār is the word for police officer; why it is used in this connection is not clear.

[3] *Bankura Gazetteer*, p. 66; also Hunter, *Statistical Account*, Vol. I, pp. 60 ff.

From the above it will be gathered that the chief relation of the Gosvāmī to his disciples is a monetary one. They constitute his chief wealth. This is evident from the way in which a Gosvāmī's disciples are divided by his sons, in case trouble arises among them at his death. The rich and the poor among the disciples are carefully apportioned among the sons, and they may then set up separate establishments. The son of a Gosvāmī does not become the guru of his father's disciples, but the children of his father's disciples become his own; hence the care with which families are divided. The disciple has little to say to this shuffling, for he is enjoined by his religion to render absolute veneration to each generation of his guru's family. Many Gosvāmīs live entirely on the income derived from the gifts and fees paid by their disciples. In some cases, as with the Kardaha Gosvāmīs, that means a position of affluence. The result is a largely parasitic class, making little return in the way of moral and spiritual leadership to justify their existence. A good many of the class own temples and property connected therewith, and are not entirely dependent on the gifts of disciples. Some Gosvāmīs enjoy landed property conferred upon their forefathers by rājās or zemindars. Instances have not been unknown where a disreputable Gosvāmī has been ejected from such property and from his village by the zemindar.

3. *Character and Standing.*

It must be kept clearly in mind that, while in theory the Gosvāmīs of the sect may be *Brahmachārīs* (celibates), actually they are almost entirely *Gṛihasthas* (householders), and not ascetics. Therefore, we find them living their lives very much in accordance with the observances of Hindu society. We shall be greatly mistaken if we expect to find exemplified among them any of the socially unorthodox practices which marked the beginnings of the movement. As a considerable majority of the Gosvāmīs of the sect are Brāhmans, it is not surprising to find that caste rules are strictly

adhered to. They marry only among themselves, and according to strict Hindu usage. Thus the members of the two leading Gosvāmī families, the Nityānanda and the Advaita lines, do not intermarry although both are Brāhman, because Nityānanda was a Rārhi and Advaita a Bārendra Brāhman—a geographical barrier that has become as fixed as the law of the Medes and Persians to the Brāhmans of Bengal. The two pure kulin Brāhman families, those of the Baghnāpāṛa and Chandanagore Gosvāmīs, pride themselves on their superior social standing, a relic of social exclusiveness dating back to the early days of Bengal. Another group, the Jirāt Gosvāmīs are also kulins, but they are tainted socially, because of decent from Nityānanda through a daughter. Hindu society could never excuse the gross breach of its order in the marriage of Nityānanda after having been an *abadhuta* ascetic, *i.e.* one who has cut off absolutely every tie with the world. In spite of his great name and fame, and his place of honour in the sect, the social taint inhering in his descendants in the eyes of Hindu society has continued to this day, and has not failed to have its influence. As a whole, the Gosvāmīs of the sect are usually in good standing in the Hindu community. At the same time, it should be said that there has always been somewhat of a tendency to look askance at them as a class, because of the character of the lower Vaishṇava adherents, and because some of them are gurus of low caste people. Their desire to be considered orthodox is further evidenced by the fact that they all claim to be Smārta, *i.e.* their religious practice based on smṛiti (*i.e.* on the Śrauta and Gṛihya Sūtras); involving usually a Saṅkarite point of view hardly in keeping with Chaitanya's bhakti teaching.

Brāhman Gosvāmīs do not dine with non-Brāhmans of this order, nor eat food cooked by non-Brāhmans, even at the *Mahotsava*, the great feast of the sect, at which all caste differences are supposedly forgotten. We have seen how, in certain outstanding instances in the history of the sect, saintly men of lower caste have

been honoured as gurus by Brāhman disciples. But to-day there are not many instances of non-Brāhman Gosvāmīs with Brāhman disciples, only a few of the Vaidya caste retaining such disciples. During the past dozen years there seems to have been a strong revival of Brāhmanic feeling; and therefore Brāhman disciples of non-Brāhman Gosvāmīs naturally find themselves in an awkward and difficult position. Most of the non-Brāhman Gosvāmīs have their disciples from among their corresponding castes. Any move towards caste relaxation is met with determined hostility on the part of the Brāhman Gosvāmīs. We are forced to conclude that the spirit of the origin of the Chaitanya movement has little influence over the great body of the spiritual preceptors of the sect to-day.

In point of scholarship, the Gosvāmīs as a whole are uneducated men. In former times there was more incentive to scholarship, and the greatest honour was reserved for those who approximated to the great ideal set up by the original scholar-saints of the sect. But such conditions no longer obtain. Everything is against such scholarly lives. Of the most influential body—the Nityānanda Gosvāmīs of Kardaha—very few are educated even in Sanskrit, and fewer still have received a Western education. Some members of Gosvāmī families go in for modern education, but such men seldom continue to live as gurus thereafter. Some Gosvāmīs combine business with their guruship. Even though engaged in shopkeeping or what not, they continue their relation to disciples.

For spiritual guidance and any real moral and social leadership in all that makes for the progress and well-being of society, the Gosvāmīs as a whole are not qualified. The principle by which they function in Vaishṇava society is thoroughly vicious, the basis of their guruship being inheritance rather than qualifications for leadership. No matter how worthless, ignorant and good-for-nothing a Gosvāmī's son may be, he becomes the object of the same reverence which his father received. This veneration rests upon universally

accepted teaching, which makes the guru the direct representative of Kṛishṇa. His wrath is more potent for evil than the displeasure of Hari himself.[1] Definite and explicit worship of the guru is inculcated in the ritual works which guide the daily practice of the disciple. For the devout disciple he is the vehicle of deity.

Thus securely esconsed in the superstitious awe of the laity, the Gosvāmī is not greatly concerned with fitness for leadership. His main interest is in the preservation of his vested interests—the disciples bequeathed to him—and in the realisation of the financial assets represented by them. Questions of moral and social import, the welfare of society, do not impinge upon the consciousness of the average Gosvāmī. Untouched by modern education themselves, they look with disfavour on its spread among their disciples. Their interests are involved in the old order, in the continuance of an unenlightened, custom-bound community. The degradation of much of their sect life, the pathetic ignorance and blind groping after religious satisfaction of their simple village folk, the evil repute of the celibate order and the lower ranks of Vaishṇavism, have elicited no concerted efforts for reform from these so-called spiritual leaders. They do not care; they have no vision of what should be. Therefore they do not and cannot lead in any real sense. They constitute a parasitic growth that exists to feed upon the movement, of which, by reason of the vitiating doctrine common to so much of popular Hinduism, they happen to be the spiritual potentates.

Even were there enlightened vision and moral energy, there exists no means by which progressive action could be taken by the Gosvāmīs. There is no organisation among them, no sense of coherence, no community of action. Beyond the rather vague allegiance of most of them to the Nityānanda house, which involves no co-ordination whatever, there is no

[1] See above, p. 103.

tie binding them together. Even among the branches of the same house, there is no cohesion. Each family line goes its own way. Association for common ends, mutual interests and united action, is an idea that has never disturbed the even tenor of their ways.

B. The Gṛihasthas

The gṛihasthas (householders) are the laity of the sect. They are the main body of its adherents, ordinary Hindu folk of various castes. They are the disciples of the Gosvāmīs.

The Vaishṇavism of many of these who compose the rank and file is not always a clear-cut sectarian faith. Often enough it is a mixed affair, compounded of other elements in the prevalent Hinduism about them. Sometimes the Vaishṇava element may be hardly more than the vegetarianism which persists so surprisingly in family tradition. Often enough it is the women of a home who maintain the Vaishṇava worship, the men more easily sharing in the Śākta rites of their neighbours. One of my student friends, who comes of a Vaishṇava home, told me that his father worshipped both Kṛishṇa and Śiva, and that his grandfather was a Śaivite. On the other hand, there are doubtless many homes still where much of the earlier sectarian feeling is maintained, to which every name of rites and symbols of the Śākta cult is an abomination. It appears, however, that this sharpness of outline is largely a thing of the past among the laity of the sect to-day.

It should be perfectly clear that, as far as the domestic life of these householders is concerned, they have not departed from orthodox Hinduism. They observe the Smārta rites that control all Hindu domestic life. Indeed, even in Chaitanya's day, Vaishṇavas never broke away from Smārta rules. Their sectarianism is a matter of religious worship, and does not affect their domestic usage. They are regular caste Hindus, following more or less generally in matters of religion the way of worship and devotion associated with the name of Chaitanya.

Modern education has had an inevitable effect on this group, particularly in loosening the bonds of their discipleship to the Gosvāmīs. Gurus persist in a family generation after generation, but, as individuals in the family become educated, the hold of the guru in such a home is greatly weakened, and he no longer meets with the superstitious reverence of the past. The more obsequious forms of veneration are discarded, and the ignorance of so many of the Gosvāmīs puts them at a disadvantage with educated disciples. Many such, indeed, refuse utterly to recognise the claims of their family gurus to superiority, and pay them no veneration whatever.

C. The Vairāgīs

The vairāgīs constitute the ascetic order of the sect. As we have seen in tracing the history of the sect, the origin of this order is by no means clear. Whatever may have been its beginnings, there is no system whatever about it now. It can in nowise be compared, for instance, to the mendicant orders in the Christian Church in the Middle Ages, with their organisation, their discipline, their monastic life, ordered to the last detail by universally acknowledged authority. We have spoken of the vairāgīs of the sect as an order, but that is entirely a misnomer in the sense of these mediæval orders, or the Buddhist monastic order. There is no such organised body of ascetics in the Chaitanya sect; nothing even of the definiteness of the various orders of the sannyāsīs. There are only individuals who have adopted the ascetic life, and have undergone a form of initiation at the hands of some other ascetic of the sect. In this sense only can they be called an order. Beyond the one fact of initiation required of them all, there is discernible no standard, rule, discipline or authority by which the semblance of organisation can be detected. There are certain general rules of conduct observed by these Chaitanya ascetics, but they are applicable to all sādhus of whatever sect, and can hardly be taken as constituting a discipline for an order of this sect.

Probably Vīrabhadra, the reputed founder of this ascetic phase of the sect, introduced the form of initiation called bhek, and left the movement to take what form it might. There is no authoritative manual dealing with the life and duties of vairāgīs, but a few popular booklets set forth in general the ideas and practices observed by them.

The Requirements of Bhek.

The term bhek is explained by Vaishṇavas as coming from the Bengali word "bes," meaning dress. Originally signifying a kind of dress, the word came to stand for those who wore the dress, *i.e.* ascetics. But this seems fanciful. Dr. Sen is probably much nearer to the truth in thinking that the word is derived from the Buddhist term, "bhikshu," beggar. If this is so, it sheds much light on the source of a great deal of the deterioration for which "bhek" stands. The word means the initiation into the ascetic life, and stands also for that life itself. A man "takes bhek," and thereupon becomes a *bhekdhārī*, a bhek holder, or, more likely, a holder of the beggar's bowl. Bhek can only be given by a bhekdhārī, one who is already an ascetic. I have found it stated in various places that Gosvāmīs can give bhek but this seems to be a mistake. It should not be given to those who are unfit morally, mentally, or physically; to those who are lacking in bhakti; and to those who are followers of antagonistic systems of thought. The chief requisite is the desire to surrender everything to Kṛishṇa, which is the highest of the nine points of bhakti. There are no caste restrictions in taking bhek among the Chaitanya Vaishṇavas. All alike are entitled to enter the ascetic life. This is essentially different from the various sannyāsī orders into which no Śūdra may enter.

The ritual of initiation is as follows.[1] No auspicious time is required for taking bhek, the emphasis being,

[1] From *Beshāśrayavidhi*, by Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī. This work explicitly declares that the subject is not treated systematically in the bhakti śāstras, but that details on it are collected here.

rather, on the state of mind of the aspirant. Ten *saṅskāras*, or purifications, are necessary: fasting, shaving the head, bathing in holy water, wearing the *tulsī* garland, putting on the *tilaks*,[1] etc., taking a name, receiving the mantra, taking the *kaupina*, worshipping Kṛishṇa and making surrender to Kṛishṇa. The day previous to the ceremony is spent in fasting, lying on the ground. Rising early on the appointed day, the candidate shaves his head and bathes in Ganges or other holy water (*tīrthajal*), with which is mixed *pañchagavya* (five products of the cow, namely, urine, excreta, curds, milk, and clarified butter). After smearing the body with earth with appropriate mantras, and drinking water in which the image of Kṛishṇa has been bathed (*charaṇāmṛita*), he presents himself before the guru wearing a fresh dhoti and chādar. The guru, taking a tulsī-bead garland, offers it first to the image of Kṛishṇa, and then, having put it around his own neck, puts it on the candidate's neck with this mantra, which the latter repeats:

O garland of tulsī, O dear to Kṛishṇa's people, I put these on. Make me dear to Kṛishṇa as you are beloved of Vishṇu and his people. Make me thus dear to Kṛishṇa.

Then the guru takes *gopīchandana*, whitish clay, and marks on the candidate's body the twelve tilaks, on forehead, stomach, breast, throat, both sides of the stomach, both arms and shoulders, and the back, at neck and waist. The *chakra* (wheel) and conch (traditional marks of Vishṇu) are stamped on either armpit, and names of Kṛishṇa are added anywhere on the body above the naval. The twelve tilaks each represent a name of Kṛishṇa and are put on with a special mantra for each. The guru then places his hand on the candidate's head and gives him a name, beginning with the first letter of his original name, including a name of Kṛishṇa and the name Chaitanya, and ending with "dās." The kaupina and *dor* are then put on him by the guru, who ties the knot himself, and adds the outer

[1] Distinctive sectarian marks.

garment, called *bahirbās*. The kaupina is a narrow strip of cloth worn between the thighs by Chaitanya vairāgīs in common with most sādhus. The dor is the string about the waist which holds the kaupina securely in place. It is the assumption of the kaupina that symbolizes the candidate's initiation into vairāgya. The new vairāgī now receives a mantra if he has never received one before. He is also given the *kāma gāyatrī* and the *mahāmantra*, the latter a mantra popularly used for the practice of Harināma, the repetition of the divine name. The worship of Kṛishṇa follows, in which the guru guides the new vairāgī in his worship, and directs his act of surrender to Kṛishṇa. Certain rules pertaining to the ascetic life are enjoined upon him by the guru in private, and the ceremony is concluded by his taking the leavings of the guru as prasāda, and by his feeding the assembled Vaishṇavas according to his ability.

The customary fee for this initiation is one rupee and four annas, which goes to the bhek-dhārī, or guru, who performs the ceremony. It is an illuminating commentary upon the strength and persistence of caste feeling in this country, that even this act of initiation into an order of life which supposedly transcends all caste, and in a sect founded in the enthusiasm of caste abrogation, must be performed by one from whom water can be taken. It is interesting to note that women may take bhek, but in their case the ceremony of assuming the kaupina is omitted.

The rules mentioned above may be summarised as follows. The new vairāgī must worship Śrī Chaitanya, reverencing all the *avatāras* from Nārāyaṇa to Chaitanya. He must spend time at Brindāban, and consort only with Vaishṇavas. Daily he must recite mantras, the kāmagāyatrī, perform Harināma, and read or listen to the reading of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. He must not take water from a non-Vaishṇava, or receive anything which has not been offered to Kṛishṇa. He must not take food offered to any other god, and must not swear in Hari's name even if his life be at stake! He is

required to observe the ceremonies of Janmāshṭamī[1] and Ekādaśī,[2] and in all things the practices of an *ekāntin* Vaishṇava, *i.e.* one who has forsaken all other gods except Kṛishṇa. He must rid his mind of all ideas of possession, and adjust himself to the life of a vairāgī. He is to meditate on the eight ślokas of Chaitanya, and throughout the eight parts of the day and night he should contemplate the attitudes of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa. He is to consider himself freed from the rules of purification; after death, his body may be burnt, buried, or cast in a river.

In another of these popular manuals[3] we find a few rules on begging. Whatever is received without begging is considered best of all; that which is begged from door to door is next in value; while that which is obtained by begging from the rich is of least value. Begging should not take place on fast days, or on days of new and full moon; it is likewise prohibited on the banks of or on the Ganges, or any river, in the market, or in a desert place. Land, silver, rice, cloth or gold should not be received. Food offered at the śrāddha ceremony is taboo. The village priest, a wine merchant, a Chaṇḍāla, or other low-caste person, and a Mlechha[4] should not be approached.

In a third manual[5] particular stress is laid upon the esoteric means of cultivating bhakti for the vairāgī.[6] While outwardly observing the rigid life of asceticism, inwardly he is to experience the delights of the gopīs with Kṛishṇa. Identifying himself with one of them, he is, in imagination, to play her part in the amorous sports with Kṛishṇa. The state of a *siddha*, a vairāgī who has attained complete liberation or perfection, is that where this imaginative play becomes the sole reality. The service of this loving devotion as a female

[1] The birthday of Kṛishṇa.

[2] The eleventh lunar day after new or full moon, observed as a day of fasting and worship.

[3] *Bhekāśrita Tattva Grantha*, by Kālīprasanna Vidyāratna.

[4] Non-Hindu.

[5] *Vairāgya Nirṇay*, by Sripād Narottama Ṭhākura.

[6] See above, pp. 110 ff.

to Kṛishṇa becomes so vivid as to be the only reality, and the devotee lies abstracted in the blissful emotion of love. This is the ideal of the true vairāgī; his heaven is above all others.

The Life of the Ākhṛās

The life of the vairāgīs of the sect to-day centres in the ākhṛā, or maṭha, the monastery of the Chaitanyas. The suggestions of the word monastery, however, are misleading, as the average ākhṛā among the Chaitanya vairāgīs is of a very simple nature. Sometimes it is an institution capable of sheltering a score or two, but more often it is the simple village hut, where one or two vairāgīs make their abode, joined now and then by a few of their fellow mendicants. Strictly speaking, an ākhṛā is to be looked for in connection with a temple or shrine; but as commonly used in Bengal the term includes any place where a few vairāgīs congregate, whether connected with a temple or not. A friend, whose boyhood was spent in Bhowanipur, Calcutta, tells me of such an unpretentious vairāgī centre near his childhood home. A single vairāgī, with several female associates, lived there. From time to time other mendicants of his kind would appear there for a while, and then pass on. Now and then a saṅkīrtan would be held. Begging seemed to be the principal feature of its life.

Many villages of Bengal have such places on their outskirts, ranging from a single abode to a more pretentious community, living in a group of huts under the rule of a head, known as a mahant. Doubtless the latter type has evolved out of the former. Usually an ākhṛā considerable enough to have a mahant is attached to, or in the vicinity of, a Vaishṇava temple, and is in relationship to the Gosvāmī family which owns the temple. Practically all the temples of any size have ākhṛās in connection as a part of the establishment.

As we have indicated, there is very little in the way of rule or discipline in these ākhṛās. The requirement of daily worship, encumbent upon all good and pious

Vaishṇavas, is, of course, in force. But even here considerable latitude is allowed; for the full ritual, as set forth in the manuals of the sect, would engage the worshipper's time for much of the day and night. No system of study is obligatory; indeed, the illiterate character of most of the vairāgīs would make such a thing impossible. Beyond a more or less desultory repetition or singing of portions of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* or of the *Chaitanya Charitāmṛita* daily, there is nothing in the life of these institutions that could remotely be included under the term intellectual pursuits. Nor is there any definite teaching of the laity connected with the ākhṛā, beyond the reading just mentioned. This does, indeed, constitute something of a teaching and inspirational agency. People are free to come and listen, and thus are led to imbibe some knowledge of the Vaishṇava faith. Occasionally, also, a saṇkīrtan is held, which the Vaishṇava laity of the neighbourhood attend and share in. Broadly speaking, however, it is fair to say that the vairāgī has no teaching function in the sect.

The chief feature of the life of these ākhṛās seems to be mendicancy. This appears to be the main function of a vairāgī. The characteristic mark of a Chaitanya mendicant is that his begging is accompanied by song. The stamp of joyous song impressed upon the movement by Chaitanya's lyric soul is still evident in the grotesque music of the humble vairāgī. In the villages of Bengal, especially in those sections where Vaishṇavism is prevalent, it is a common feature of early morning life to see a group of these vairāgīs begging from door to door, accompanied perhaps by their female companions, and wakening the echoes with their vociferous songs, to the accompaniment of long, slender drum and tiny cymbals. In Calcutta as well, along the streets of the Indian section, this singing mendicancy is to be observed, the singers usually working in pairs. With the proceeds of this morning visitation of houses and shops the inmates of the ākhṛā maintain themselves.

In some cases, however, there are other means of support resorted to in addition to begging. The inmates of certain ākhṛās have been known to do some manual labour, such as basket-making. And occasionally a vairāgī may possess a bit of land, presented to him by some devout householder, or held over from the days before he "took bhek." In such cases the vairāgī usually lets out the property and receives rent. Such an ascetic, perhaps, would vary his mendicancy by cultivation of the soil at certain times of the year. This, however, is in direct contravention of the ascetic vows assumed by the vairāgī; and it would seem to be rare. In some cases the larger ākhṛās possess a measure of landed endowment, which serves to insure an income for the community supplementary to the proceeds from mendicancy. In these institutions, as in temples, it is the custom to feed visiting Vaishṇavas.

It must not be thought that the routine of the ākhṛā comprises the whole of the vairāgī life. While many do settle down more or less in one place, still for the majority there is another side. There is the call of the road, the life of pilgrimage, the interesting and always varied quest of new scenes. From Navadvīp to Purī and then to Brindāban, and back to Nadia, with other sacred places thrown in—this gives scope for a very considerable roving propensity. Then there are the many melās and festivals throughout the year to be visited. All this, doubtless, is the real life to many of the vairāgīs, and constitutes much of the charm which draws them into the ascetic life.[1]

[1] The following vivid description of vairāgīs at a bathing festival in Bengal, gives a glimpse of gypsy-like nomadic life. The people described are, probably, of some one of the sub-sects in Bengal, not strictly Chaitanya vairāgīs, who usually shave the head and do not wear the yellow robe:

"At one end of the mile of bazaar and houses there stands a peepul tree, and from its shade there comes a cheery sound of singing, accompanied by drum and cymbal. There you have the troupe that fills the place of the 'Niggers,' or 'The Coons,' on an English beach. This is, however, a troupe of Boeragis and Boeragins, men and women 'free from worldly attachment,' wearing the yellow robe, and wandering

The mahant, found in all the larger ākhṛās, is usually a vairāgī raised from the ranks of his fellow ascetics or a guru around whom an ākhṛā has grown up. The mode of succession varies somewhat, but, as a rule, the ruling mahant designates his successor. This power to choose the successor is absolute in some cases, as, for instance when the ākhṛā is the personal property of the mahant. Sometimes there seems to be something like a popular choice by the vairāgī members of the ākhṛā. Any vairāgī may aspire to the honour and make a canvass for it, even to the point of bribing his fellow vairāgīs in return for their votes. This, however, is not common. The choice of a new mahant in many places does not seem to be complete without the recognition and sanction of the Gosvāmī who stands in particular relation to the ākhṛā. Whether or not there is a uniform procedure for the induction of a new mahant I cannot say, nor how widely, if so, it prevails. But in

from place to place. Mats are spread under the tree, and in the front row sit the men, whilst behind them sit their women folk—the exact relations between them perhaps we had better not stop to enquire, they may be somewhat complicated. The men are singing, and accompanying themselves on drum, cymbals, simple violin, and a little instrument made of a hollowed gourd with a single string. The leader has a robe brighter in colour than the rest, and cleaner. He is a striking figure, with head of fine, long, coal-black hair, and a black flowing beard. His bold black eyes dance and shine as he leads his orchestra. He holds his ascetic's tongs loosely between the thumb and first finger of each hand, and gives them a free twisting motion, so that their clank may fall in time with the clanging of the cymbals and the throbbing of the drum. He looks the gay man of the world. In front of them a man is dancing and posturing to the music, and his dancing is more than suggestive. They are singing a religious, antiphonal song, and as they sing, in perfect lilt and time, every movement, every knowing smile, every body jerk, every lithe motion of the man dancing, has its suggestion to those who know and understand, and 'religious' as the song may be, the emotions these men often arouse would not be called religious by the strict moralist. Amongst them sits a Boeragi with a white beard, and his smile is more knowing and repellent than that of any of the others. No man goes round with the hat, as on the sands, but one of the Boeraginis, with a brass begging bowl, is attending to that side of matters. And the Boeragi troupe is doing not half badly from the business point of view."—From an article in *The Statesman*, on "Ganga Poojah: Pilgrims on the Bhagirathi."

certain districts, at least, the following steps are necessary. The newly-chosen mahant has to invite the chief members of the various branches of the ruling Gosvāmī family to a great feast (the mahotsava) and make a gift of at least one rupee and four annas to each of the Gosvāmīs. In return he receives a written document confirming his mahantship. To be acceptable to the Gosvāmī the new mahant must be of a caste from which water can be taken by a Brāhman.

The functions of a mahant have to do with the direction of life in the ākhṛā. The principal item in this is the daily worship of the images in the shrine, either in the ākhṛā or adjoining it. These images are usually those of Chaitanya, Rādhā and Kṛishṇa. Then, daily homage with certain flower and food offerings must be paid to the memory of the departed mahants whose remains, or certain relics of whom, are interred or enshrined in the ākhṛā and revered in a manner that borders on worship. On certain occasions the Mahotsava ceremony has to be celebrated by the mahant; and festive occasions in the homes of householder adherents have to be graced by his presence. The giving of bhek falls to his charge, and in those cases where he may have disciples among lay Vaishṇavas, he must visit them periodically, just as in the case of the Gosvāmīs whose visits we have described. It is not unusual for a mahant to have disciples, and thus to assume the guru relation which was originally the sole province of the Gosvāmīs. Indeed, vairāgīs themselves may have disciples. Some years ago there was a famous vairāgī in Navadvīp—a man of education—who had Brāhman and even Gosvāmī disciples. He was buried in one of the temples there, and receives daily worship.

Female Ascetics.

Vairāgīs are, of course, vowed to a life of celibacy, but the life of the ākhṛās shows a wide departure in practice from this ideal. In most of them there are women inhabitants, who are usually themselves female ascetics, vairāgiṇīs. They are called *sevādāsīs*, maid

servants, but it must be confessed that, as a rule, they are also concubines. Usually they live quite openly with mahant or vairāgī as wives. In one village, I am told, on the death of the mahant of the ākhṛā, the woman who had lived as his wife took a fancy to a young fellow in the village, not a vairāgī at all, and managed to get him sanctioned by the Gosvāmīs as the mahant of the ākhṛā. He is now living with several women about him, supported in comfort by his disciples.

Just how and why these women come into the mendicant life and into this free relationship with vairāgīs is not easy to determine. It is difficult to get all the facts about such a situation; for, while the condition is manifest and has long been accepted, naturally the adherents of the sect do not relish the unveiling of the unsavoury aspects of their movement. In conversation with the mahant of an ākhṛā in Navadvīp, I could get no admission of the facts about Vaishṇavīs and their presence in the ākhṛās. He denied all knowledge of it; yet near us, in the ākhṛā where we sat, were two females, well past their prime, who evidently belonged there.

If we are to judge by the testimony of one writer, himself a resident of Navadvīp, we must believe that

> the Chaitanite nuns are recruited chiefly from the superannuated unfortunates of the towns. The order is joined also by some of the unchaste widows of the lower classes.[1]

But, true as this must be in part, we cannot accept it as stating the whole truth. No matter how degraded such a mendicant order may have become, it taxes credulity to be told that there come into it none of sincere purpose and decent life. Doubtless, the ranks of Hindu widows furnish a great many recruits, drawn into the mendicant life for various reasons. A vivid picture is found in Lal Behari Dey's *Bengal Peasant Life*,[2] of the enticing of a young widow into this life by a vairāgī, and it is quite likely that illicit love affairs play

[1] Bhattacharjee, *Hindu Castes and Sects*, p. 467.
[2] pp. 228 ff.

no small part in this matter. More often the recruits are widows left with no one to care for them, no family connections to hold them. Thus the way is easy. It is doubtless true also that prostitution produces candidates for the order. Whether widows or unfortunates, their action is understandable. To simple and uneducated women, consigned for life to the drudgery and constraint of a widow's lot, or ageing in the pitiless life of the prostitute, it is not strange that a Vaishṇavī's life should offer some appeal. By its very social ostracism it becomes a life of freedom, rid of all irksome restraint, and yet tinged with the romance of possible pilgrimage and the nomadic life. Practically all of the women who join the ranks of the vairāgīs take bhek and become vairāgiṇīs. Some shave their heads, but this is not true of all. Ordinarily they have no marks by which to distinguish them, wearing the usual dress of a Hindu widow. From a social point of view, much of the vairāgī life of the Vaishṇavas is really a system of widow remarriage without the recognition of society.

Not all of these vairāgiṇīs, or Vaishṇavīs, as they are indiscriminately called, are living with vairāgīs. Here and there through the villages they are to be found living alone, doing nothing in particular except the customary begging. One of my students tells me of such a Vaishṇavī in his own village. In a village in the Dacca district, I saw the ruins of a clump of huts where a group of Vaishṇavīs had lived together. They were, however, largely women whose vairāgīs had died. It is unfair, also, to take for granted that all women living in ākhṛās are living in relationship with men. Often several women may be living in an ākhṛā with one vairāgī. One of them lives as his wife, while the others are quite free of any promiscuous relationship. It is not uncommon for a respectable Vaishṇava woman, left alone in widowhood and not desiring to be a burden on her children, to take bhek and go to the ākhṛā of her guru to serve her novitiate, as it were. Here she can live her own life, without necessarily establishing any sort of connection with the male inmates.

A VAIRĀGIṆĪ OF BRINDĀBAN.

wearing a *nāmābalī*, a cloth stamped with the name of Krishṇa. The name of Chaitanya (Gaur) is stamped on her forehead and arm.

Futhermore, it is to be remembered that, among devout and elderly Vaishṇava widows, it is a common desire to spend the last days of life at Brindāban in a life of devotion. Many do this. The picture of such an one is shown on the opposite page. One of my students tells me that his own grandmother, at an extreme age, left behind her the comfort and the affectionate care of her daughter's home in Bengal, and went to Brindāban. There she took bhek and lived out her life as a vairāgiṇī. On her death the family were not permitted even to touch her body, the vairāgīs performing the last rites. No śrāddha ceremony was allowed. It is well to keep such facts of the vairāgiṇī life in mind, in judging an order which has become so degraded as has that of the Chaitanya mendicants. But, on the whole, the fact remains, that in Bengal generally the term, Vaishṇavī, has come to mean a woman of rather unsavoury character. These women are commonly called *Mātājī* just as the vairāgī is known as *Bābājī*.

In an old temple in Dacca I found a curious situation, illustrating what must be rather an unusual rôle for a Vaishṇavī. The temple was in sole possession of a woman and two youths, her adopted sons, one a defective. The *pūjārī* of the temple, a vairāgī, whom she called her guru and with whom she had been living, had recently died. He had been the guru of this woman's husband, and when she was left a widow he had persuaded her to join him. After his death the woman and the young boy of 14 years of age "carried on." The boy acted as pūjārī of the temple, and together they maintained the guru relationship to the various disciples of the vairāgī. She visited them as he had done, and received the customary gifts. When initiation was necessary, the 14-year-old boy gave initiation.

Up to within a few years ago, I am told, at an annual festival held at Pānihāti, not far from Calcutta, and also at Rangpur in northern Bengal, there used to be maintained a sort of clearing house for Vaishṇavīs. If a vairāgī did not like his partner, he could here

choose another. There were hundreds of women to pick from, but they were all placed in a row on the ground, veiled except for hands and feet, and the poor vairāgī had to risk his conjugal happiness for a year upon his skill in reading character in a lady's finger tips! Once chosen, the arrangement had to stand for a year, and the vairāgī paid a small fee for the service. Whether anything of the sort is still to be found in Bengal I cannot say, but it is quite possible.

The women often take their share of the begging along with the men. In Bankim Chatterjee's novel, *Bishabṛiksha*, there is a vivid picture of the inner apartments of a well-to-do Bengali household, with the women and children being entertained by a Vaishṇavī who sang of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa's amours. More often, probably, they accompany the vairāgīs as they go their rounds, joining with them in song. Formerly, they were of considerable use in spreading Vaishṇavism among the womenfolk of better-class homes; for they were literate enough to teach the faith. But now there is little, if anything, of this sort of thing going on. The mendicant class of the sect, including both sexes, has become so illiterate and of such low repute, that it possesses neither the ability nor sanctity necessary to make it a force. In general estimation the terms vairāgī and vairāgiṇī have come to stand very largely for ignorance and dissoluteness. The demonstration of the state in which vairāgīs have for long habitually lived lies in the fact of the distinct class which makes up the fourth of the groups into which the sect is divided. It is composed to a large extent of the offspring of vairāgīs.

Principal Ākhṛās.

The principal ākhṛās of the sect are those of Navadvīp and Purī. At each spot in Bengal made famous by association with the life of Chaitanya or his leading disciples, there are usually temples and ākhṛās. At Ḍhākkā-dakshin, in Sylhet, the home of Chaitanya's father, there are a well-known temple and several ākhṛās;

GILDED IMAGE OF GAURĀṄGA AT NAVADVĪP.

WAYSIDE CHAITANYA SHRINE NEAR THE BATHING-GHAT BĀGHBAZAR, CALCUTTA.

and Sylhet town possesses a dozen ākhṛās at least, most of which possess some endowment. Those at Kālnā, near Navadvīp, and Rāyganj, in the Dinājpur district, are well known among Vaishṇavas. In Navadvīp there are some ten ākhṛās capable of sheltering from 20 to 30 inmates, and many small ones. The largest, known as "the baṛa ākhṛā," has no direct connection in tradition with Chaitanya, but that which is associated with the famous courtyard of Śrīvāsa is, of course, of special sanctity. In the "baṛa ākhṛā" Kṛishṇa is worshipped, but, in the latter, Gaurāṅga himself. The larger ākhṛās of Navadvīp are fairly commodious, with a large covered pavement in the centre, or adjoining, for kīrtans. In Purī there are two associated with the Chaitanya vairāgīs, the Rādhākānta maṭha and the Yameśvarṭoṭa ākhṛā, where Chaiṭanya himself lived during his life at Purī. The latter is connected with the Gopīnāth temple, and may be called the chief centre of the sect in Orissa. The cell occupied by Chaitanya is shown here, together with what remains of certain relics. The mahant of the Rādhākānta maṭha is an intelligent man, educated in English. He is a descendant of Bakreśvar, one of the companions of Chaitanya. Of the smaller ākhṛās throughout Orissa, I am told the mahants are sometimes of the householder class.

There are a good many ākhṛās of some standing in and about Calcutta, belonging to the Chaitanya Vaishṇavas. Some of these are of considerable age, but they have degenerated and lost much of their prestige. Vairāgīs still frequent them, however, and in the month of Kārtik (October—November) they gather here in considerable numbers. The Mahāprabhū's ākhṛā, in Hāttalla, belongs to the Bāghnāpāṛa line of Gosvāmīs. With the shrine attached, it is supported largely by their disciples. The Tetultalla ākhṛā claims a record of more than 300 years. Its ordinary complement of vairāgīs is seven or eight, but this number is swelled to twenty or thirty in Kārtik. The Baladev ākhṛā, named from its idol, is on Grey Street. It is 150 years old and harbours upwards of 50 vairāgīs in Kārtik. Formerly

this ākhṛā was ruled over by a woman, whose property it was. In Nimtolla Ghat Street is the *Sarabhuj* Mahāprabhū ākhṛā, possessing a six-armed image of Chaitanya, the arms representing the three avatārs of Vishṇu, *viz.* Rāma, Kṛishṇa and Chaitanya. This institution is considered one of the oldest and best of the sect, claiming some 300 years antiquity. It accommodates from half a dozen inmates in ordinary times to 50 in Kārtik. In the centre of the Marwari district there is a large maṭha, called the Baṛa Ākhṛā, which is a dungeon-like place frequented chiefly by *Brajbāsīs i.e.* vairāgīs from Brindāban. Its mahant is a Bengali. There are numerous other ākhṛās in Calcutta, along the water front and in the neighbourhood of the principal bathing ghats. But these places lack the permanence of those named; they are inhabited by vairāgīs, from Orissa chiefly, who settle down wherever they find a convenient shrine.

None of these ākhṛās have any endowment, but are supported by the gifts of disciples. As many of the wealthy Śurīs (wine merchants) and similar caste families of north Calcutta are Vaishṇavas, the support of these unpretentious shrines and ākhṛās should not be a problem. They are quite humble in appearance, outwardly having little to distinguish them from the dwelling houses of ordinary type in the congested areas of Calcutta. A series of small rooms around a limited courtyard, on one side of which is a small shrine containing the images of Gaur-Nitāi and Rādhā-Kṛishṇa—this is all that appears to the outward eye in the humbler of these ākhṛās.

Death Customs.

On the death of a vairāgī there is no fixed rule for the disposal of the body, and any vairāgī may perform the final rites. The body may be burnt, buried, or floated away on the waters of a river. As a rule the body is buried, although the exceptions are many. No śrāddha is performed for a vairāgī. The following ceremonial is observed at burial. The twelve tilaks

are put on the body and the *bīj mantra*, a mystic word or syllable representing a mantra, is stamped on each tilak with *chandana* paste, and over each is placed a leaf of tulsī. A fresh kaupina is put on the body, and a *nāmābali*—a cloth on which are stamped or printed the names of Kṛishṇa—is wrapped about the head. After burial, *āratī*, the waving of lights, is performed while circling the grave, and a tulsī plant is planted on the grave. Then takes place the mahotsava, the common meal of all Vaishṇavas, which seems to take the place of the śrāddha and must be held at the death of every vairāgī. *Dai* and *chira*, curds and flattened rice, are eaten on this occasion. There must be at least five vairāgīs present to constitute a mahotsava, according to the rule told me in the Dacca district. Akin to this is the *dibasi*, a feast eaten by the vairāgīs who have taken part in the burial of a mahant. It is held immediately after the ceremony, and must be observed each month thereafter, on the day of the death, for twelve months.

A brick tomb, called *samādhi*, is erected over the grave of a vairāgī if there is sufficient means. In case the vairāgī had disciples, they provide the samādhi; if he were an inmate of a considerable ākhṛā, it probably takes the necessary steps. Daily offerings of flowers and chandana are made at the samādhi, by disciples or others. In the courtyard of a temple in Dacca I noted a row of samādhis, marking the graves of the various pūjārīs and vairāgīs who had served there. Those most recently deceased had much the least pretentious samādhis; due, probably, to a dwindling constituency of disciples. The Vaishṇavī who had lived with the last vairāgī pūjārī cared for the samādhi scrupulously. Every morning it was washed with *lep* (a wash made from cowdung), or some whitening material, and flowers and chandana offered. In the evening she performed the *dhūpāratī*, waving a pot of burning incense before it and around it. The expense of this is borne by the disciples of the departed vairāgī.

Of the extent of this ascetic order in the sect it is

impossible to say. There are no statistics available. But the number is still considerable, although there has been a decided falling off in recent years. Its influence and importance is very little, and it exists chiefly as a melancholy symbol of moral degeneration and corruption more potent than the spiritual life which gave it birth.

D. The Jāt Vairāgīs

The fourth class of the sect, colloquially known as *Jāt Baishṭams* is composed of those who are the offspring of vairāgīs, or who have come into the sect through being outcasted from their own community, or for any reason whatever. This phase of Vaishṇavism is reflected in a Bengali proverb, which can hardly be improved upon for terseness: "*Jāt hārāle Baishṭam*" (a Vaishṇava because he has lost caste).

In Risley's *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, this section of the Vaishṇava community is treated as though it were a separate caste. This is due, probably, to the fact that it has no caste standing, because it does not observe the Smārta rules, which are the basis of the social and domestic life of all Hindu society. It is a strictly Vaishṇava community in this sense, living by Vaishṇava rites entirely. This is what differentiates it, although a group of householders, from the *gṛihastha* class of the sect. For instance, it has its own marriage ritual, widow marriage is allowed, and divorce is practised. Divorcees also are re-married. There are no *gotras*[1] in the community, but they claim an *Achyuta gotra* from Kṛishṇa himself. The lack of the Smārta rites in marriage has occasioned dissatisfaction, since their marriage cannot be recognised as legal in Hindu law. This has led to the adoption in recent years of certain forms to give the appearance of Smārta legality. The reform marriage Bills, that have occasioned so much discussion in the past few years,

[1] Descent from an ancient sage establishing a "real or imaginary community of blood." Cf. Max Müller, *Ancient Sansk. Lit.*, p. 195.

would benefit this community particularly. In the census of 1901 this group was enumerated as below all castes. This caused much heart-burning in the Calcutta community, with the result that its leaders in a public meeting organised themselves as a non-caste community.

The gurus of this community are usually called *adhikārīs*, and are men of the community who have raised themselves socially by marriage into a caste family. They are disciples of regular Gosvāmīs. In some cases Gosvāmīs serve as gurus, but they are looked down upon by other Brāhman Gosvāmīs. The community has gained in strength through the accession of higher grade men, and is growing in numbers. A private census recently showed some three lakhs of members. The census for 1911 showed a gain of eight per cent. for the whole sect in Bengal.

Vairāgīs who turn from their mendicant life and become householders, and thus members of this community, are called *saṁyogī*. The descendants of Nityānanda, strictly speaking, belong in this category. Burial is observed at death, and there is no regular śrāddha.

CHAPTER IX

THE SECT AS IT IS TO-DAY: ITS CULT

Temples and Shrines

Apart from Navadvīp the Chaitanya sect is not possessed of temples of any size or importance. There are many small ones scattered about Bengal and Orissa, particularly in places connected with Chaitanya, but it can boast no large and imposing shrine. Navadvīp may be allowed as the one exception to this statement. Several temples there, although of no great size, are rich in popular affection. Of greatest sanctity, probably, is the image of Gaurāṅga, made for the stricken wife out of the *nim* tree which sheltered his birth. It is open to doubt whether the nearly life-sized image worshipped to-day in Navadvīp is the actual image that consoled the young wife, but at least the worshippers believe it and are satisfied. Some fragments of the original image may very likely be incorporated in the present figure. This image has, in recent years, been removed from its small shrine to a much more commodious temple, which bears every evidence of prosperity. It is called *Mahāprabhū's bāṛī*, the great Master's house. In front of the shrine is a spacious marble-floored court for saṅkīrtans. The temple is owned by some forty separate families, from among whom the sevāits, those who serve the god's image, are taken. The service of the Gaurāṅga image in this temple is jealously restricted. No Brāhman not of these Gosvāmī families is allowed to touch the image. The families who share in the ownership of the temple all have proportionate shares in its service, and most of them are maintained entirely from its revenues.[1]

[1] This sharing in the temple revenues involves a very complicated system. The shares are not in the actual revenues, but in the privilege

These families are members of the Navadvīp Gosvāmī house descended from Sanātana Miśra, the father of Chaitanya's second wife, who was himself a staunch Śākta by sect.

One of the most sacred spots in Navadvīp is the *Śrīvāsāṅgaṁ*, the so-called site of Śrīvāsa's courtyard, where Chaitanya inaugurated the famous kīrtan which gave birth to the whole movement. The original site, together with Chaitanya's own home, was long ago washed away by the Bhāgīrathī river, but the courtyard is shown nevertheless. It now houses an ākhṛā owned by a Gosvāmī of the Nityānanda line. An image of Chaitanya is worshipped here. There is another temple claiming to be *Mahāprabhū's bāṛī*, also called the Golden-image Temple because of its gilded life-size image of Gaurāṅga.[1] It is the property of a Nityānanda Gosvāmī, of Calcutta, and sevāits are employed for its service. There is evidently considerable rivalry between these temples.

A shrine very popular among the women is that of Śachī and Vishṇupriyā, mother and wife of Chaitanya. Images of both these gentle ladies are worshipped here. It seems clear that the ownership of a Chaitanya shrine in Navadvīp is a profitable enterprise, since new temples are being added to the list all the while. Naturally the Navadvīp Gosvāmīs, who are the ruling power there ecclesiastically, have somewhat of a monopoly, and most of the shrines that have developed are in their hands. But others, not of the Gosvāmī class at all, have ventured to dispute the monopoly, and with

of serving as sevāits. Each owner is allotted so much time in which he is the sole sevāit. During this period he receives the entire revenue of the temple, in gifts for worship, etc. Thus the temptation is great for each one, during his time in charge, to extort every possible pice from pilgrims. This system has doubtless caused a thoroughly vicious practice, which exists at Navadvīp, as also (I believe) at Brindāban, called *bhet*, by which every pilgrim has to pay four annas before he can even enter a temple. Local residents and Brāhmans are exempt from this tax. The money goes to the sevāit in charge.

[1] See illustration, p. 174.

unblessed shrines, as it were, are competing for the pilgrim business.

At Ḍhākkādakshin, in Sylhet, the birthplace of Chaitanya's father, there is a temple of considerable size, where Chaitanya is worshipped as an incarnation of Kṛishṇa. This temple was founded by a female member of the family from which Chaitanya sprung. The Sylhet district is predominantly Vaishṇava, as is the country round about Dacca in East Bengal. Small temples and numerous ākhṛās flourish in these sections, and in many of them images of Chaitanya are to be found, usually associated with Nityānanda. Forty years ago Dr. Wise's investigations established the fact that in the Dacca district 74 per cent. of all temples were Vaishṇava. It must not be thought, however, that these are all Chaitanya temples. The great majority of them house images of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa.

In a Rāmaite maṭha in Dacca I found the Gaur-Nitāi images in friendly company with Rāma, Sītā and many others. One of the most curious shrines I have seen anywhere was also in Dacca. It had a gorgeous array of five practically life-sized gilded images, representing the three Prabhūs—Chaitanya, Advaita, Nityānanda—with Gadādhar and Śrīvāsa added. Nowhere else have I found these five in equal honour in a shrine. And this particular temple was presided over by a Rāmaite pūjārī, who could not tell me how it happened! Another interesting shrine was found in Dhamrāi, near Dacca. In this small temple the usual Rādhā-Kṛishṇa images, about two feet in height, were completely overshadowed by a towering image of Nityānanda, standing near as though keeping guard. These and countless other incongruities (at least to the Western eye) to be seen in the medley of images in many Hindu shrines, are to be explained very largely by the fact that the owner of a shrine rarely refuses to accept proffered images. A householder may find it inconvenient to keep up the worship of a household image, and presents it to a temple. Often it may not be the image traditionally worshipped there, but room is found for it. Usually

such gifts are accompanied by grants of money for the upkeep of the worship, and few sevāits can find it in their hearts to refuse this! Thus the origin of images in many temples is hopelessly confused, and the clarity of sectarian distinctions equally obliterated, to the woe of the foreign observer.

At Kālnā and Ambikā are well-known temples. The latter was built by Gaurī Dās, a contemporary and friend of Chaitanya, and the image of Chaitanya worshipped there was made by Gaurī Dās himself. He also made an image of Nityānanda, and the two are worshipped together here. Two relics of Chaitanya, an oar and a copy of the *Gītā*, given by him to Gaurī Dās, were for long treasures of this shrine. At Kātwā, the village near Navadvīp where Chaitanya underwent initiation as a sannyāsī, the memory of that event is perpetuated by a simple shrine. Where the beautiful locks were shaven off and buried, a small brick marker is placed, called the *keśa samādhi*. Near by is a small temple sheltering an image of Chaitanya, said to have been made by Gadādhar, one of his most faithful disciples.

Kheturi, in the Rajshahi district, as we have seen, is a famous Vaishṇava centre, because of its connection with Narottama Datta, one of the revered trio of the seventeenth century revival. The temple here was built at the instigation of Narottama, and the image of Chaitanya installed there, known as Gaura Rāy, was a famous one in the annals of the sect.

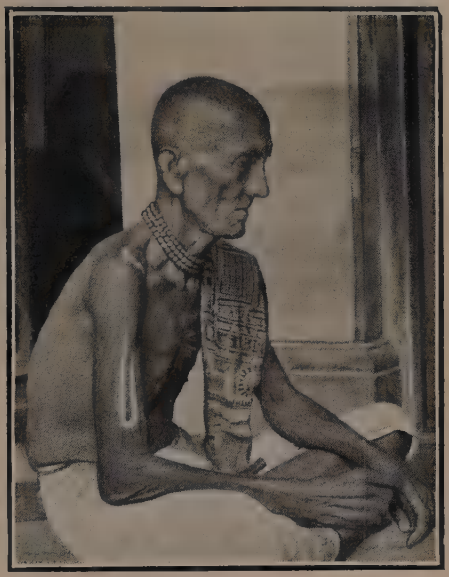
At Bāghnāpāṛa, near Kālnā, is one of the oldest temples of the sect, bearing the date of 1538. It was founded by Ram Chandra, an adopted son of Jahnavī, the accomplished wife of Nityānanda.

Kardaha, a few miles north of Calcutta, is another famous centre of the sect because of its long connection with the Nityānanda family. Here Nityānanda settled, and began the erection of the temples which were finished by his son. These are probably the oldest temples of the sect, but there is nothing of particular note about them. Both Nityānanda and Chaitanya images, called Gaur-Nitāi, are found side by side in

these shrines. In one of them are to be seen the old tantric symbols, which lend colour to the suggestion of latent tantricism in the minds of the founders.

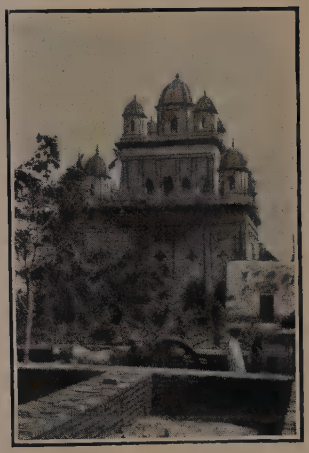
Calcutta possesses no public temple of Chaitanya, but there are many small private temples. Usually in the Kṛishṇa temples small Gaur-Nitāi images will be found flanking the main figures. In the Bāghbazar section, near the river, may be seen a wayside shrine sheltering large images of Chaitanya and Nityānanda. There is a certain fitness about this crude, simple shrine near the bathing ghats. The images are directly by the roadside, with scarcely enough space about them for the pūjārī to sit; open to every passer-by and appealing to the poor and unprivileged; symbolising in their grotesque way the appeal made by Chaitanya himself to the common folk of his day. A photograph of this shrine appears at page 174. I have been told that there are more than a hundred private temples of Chaitanya in Calcutta, but such a statement cannot be verified.

At Purī there is no large temple dedicated to Chaitanya. Jagannāth overshadows everything. Nevertheless, Chaitanya is venerated throughout Orissa as, perhaps, nowhere else. In Purī itself there are numerous small shrines where his image is worshipped, while through the country hundreds of them are to be found. The Gopīnāth temple in Purī is especially associated with Chaitanya. It is here that the devout pilgrim is told of Gaurāṅga's disappearance into the image. In the Jagannāth temple also, there are sacred spots, such as the *Garuḍa stambha*, the pillar on which Chaitanya is said to have leaned day after day during his long years of residence in Purī. From this spot he would gaze upon the image, not daring to go nearer lest his emotions should overcome him. The hollow worn by his elbow, and what is claimed to be the impress of his foot upon the pavement, are shown here. Of chief sanctity are the relics of the saint preserved in the Yameśvarṭoṭa ākhṛā. Here are shown the cell in which Chaitanya lived, and remnants of the quilt used by



MAHANT OF THE TETULTALLA ĀKHṚĀ CALCUTTA ;
THE ONLY VAIRĀGĪ MAHANT IN CALCUTTA.

GROUP OF VAIRĀGĪS IN TETULTALLA ĀKHṚĀ, CALCUTTA.



OLD VAISHṆAVA TEMPLE AT KARDAHA.

A KARDAHA SHRINE.
Gaur-Nitāi flanked by Jagannāth. Rādhā-Kṛishṇa in front.

THE BAṚA ĀKHṚĀ AT NAVADVĪP.

him, and his wooden sandals. The *saptasthān*, the seven seats, is also a spot sacred to pilgrims for its association with Chaitanya. Here stands a small ākhṛā dedicated to the memory of Haridās, the saintly Moslem convert who was buried at this spot by Chaitanya himself.

Elsewhere in Orissa practically every place associated with any visit of Chaitanya is marked by a shrine, or is made the centre of a melā held every year. Such places, for example, are Danton, a village originally associated with a story of the Buddha's washing his teeth there, but which has cheerfully put Chaitanya into the story in place of the Buddha, and celebrates the memory by holding a melā annually; Gargariya ghat, in Cuttack, where Chaitanya crossed the Mahānadī river and where the Balijātrā melā is held, a large gathering that brings together all types of Uriya life; the Mardurbazar temple, in Cuttack, dating from Chaitanya's day; Chaṇḍipur on the beach; Alālnāth, not far from Purī, with its delightful relic in the shape of a stone slab showing the impress of a man's form (made by Chaitanya when he slept there one night!), also commemorated by an annual festival. Many more such places there are visited by pilgrims, and marked by festival or shrine. One of the most interesting images of which we learn is that still to be found at Pratāpapur, near Baripada, the terminal of the M.S. Railway. Tradition maintains that this large image of Chaitanya was made to the order of King Pratāpa himself, for his own solace, when Chaitanya left Purī for Brindāban. It was left at Pratāpapur for some reason, and the king then made an endowment for it and appointed priests for the worship. A temple was also built, but after the vicissitudes of 400 years nothing seems to be left but the image itself in a small hut. Every year, however, on Chaitanya's birthday, the people gather to worship, and an all-day-and-night saṅkīrtan is held.[1]

R. L. Mitra, in his *Antiquities of Orissa*, makes the

[1] *A.S.M.*, p. 31.

assertion that the Chaitanya temples in that country number 800, and another author tells us that Chaitanya is revered by the common people as "the living personality of Jagannātha." Their two images are worshipped together, and every evening Chaitanya's name is chanted as the Vaishṇava scriptures are read.[1]

In Brindāban there is no large temple given over to the worship of Chaitanya. Although this greatest temple centre in the north of India, next to Benares, is itself, in a very real sense, a memorial to Chaitanya and his followers, his actual worship is confined to a few shrines frequented by vairāgīs and pilgrims from Bengal. In one only of the large temples—the Govindjī—in a small shrine at the rear, the images of Chaitanya and Nityānanda are to be seen.

Temple Worship

As we have already stated, the ritual for worship in the Chaitanya temples of Bengal and Orissa is mainly taken from the *Haribhaktivilāsa*. This is the acknowledged authority. It is to be remembered, however, that the *Haribhaktivilāsa* nowhere explicitly recognises the worship of Chaitanya, although it has an invocation to him at the beginning of each chapter. In this respect the Chaitanya temples go beyond the ritual authority of the sect, and follow lesser manuals more or less derived from the *Haribhaktivilāsa*. Authority for the worship of Chaitanya, while not found in the greal work of Sanātana, is legitimately derived from the theology of the sect. There is a tradition to the effect that Sanātana once asked Chaitanya how he could give directions for the worship of Kṛishṇa only, when for him and his fellow ascetics at Brindāban Chaitanya was the *ishṭa devatā*[2] (one's own god). Chaitanya answered by saying that in describing the worship of a deity the worship of those inseparably associated with

[1] *A.S.M.*, Introduction.

[2] The particular god chosen at initiation and worshipped through life above all others.

his divinity must be included also. Thus the faithful, on the strength of this tradition, find their justification for the worship not only of Chaitanya, but of his associates as well.

Details of worship and ritual vary generally according to the importance of temples and the competency of pūjārīs, but in the main the practice is the same. The pūjārīs who serve the images are generally of the Brāhman caste and of the householder order, but when the temple is owned by a vairāgī, the pūjārīs are likely to be vairāgīs also. These are rarely Brāhmans. The daily programme followed in the service of the image is outwardly very much the same as that which is to be found in the temples of all sects in India. Anyone who has lived in an Indian town or city must have vivid recollections of the insistent clangor of gong and bell, which marks the daily rising, retiring, and adoration of the god in all temples. The *Shoṛaśopachāra pūjā*, a ritual consisting of sixteen distinct offerings is the basis of all the worship in Vaishṇava temples. The pūjā includes various operations, such as the bathing of the image, its decoration and adornment, its various feedings throughout the day, its being put to rest noon and night. These operations constitute the daily routine of the pūjārīs. Accompanying these functions at certain times of the day, saṅkīrtans are held in which the worshippers may join, although generally they do not. In some of the larger temples of the sect the direction that saṅkīrtan be held three times daily may be observed, but hardly so in the average small temples. Even at Navadvīp, in the *Mahāprabhu's bārī* temple, saṅkīrtan takes place but twice daily. The singers who lead may be paid or honorary, or both. The liturgy followed by the pūjārīs is in Sanskrit, but the saṅkīrtans are chiefly in Bengali. The worshippers follow the ministrations of the pūjārīs, gazing upon the face of the image with delight. Between the various operations, especially after the presentation of food, the doors of the shrine are closed and the image is not available for worship.

There is no general act of worship in which all join, either of song or otherwise. The only requirement of the individual worshipper is the obeisance before the image, and usually the circumambulation of the temple.

One of the most important features of the temple worship, from the worshippers' standpoint, is the sharing of the god's food. The meals offered to the image, called *bhoga*, become prasāda (grace) when partaken of by the worshipper. They are truly means of grace to the devout Vaishṇava. These food offerings differ somewhat in frequency in various temples, according to the size, and also according to the number of worshippers. In the principal temple in Navadvīp there are five bhogs daily, at 6 a.m. and 9 a.m., noon, 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. In some of the Calcutta shrines of the sect three bhogs daily are the custom, increasing to four and five during the month of Kārtik, a most sacred Vaishṇava period, when many more vairāgīs are in attendance. Cooked food is served only twice or thrice a day. The noon meal is a full one, the others less so. In partaking of the god's bounty the various castes do not eat together, even though it is the prasāda of the caste-defying lord Gaurāṅga. The householders sit in groups according to castes, and the vairāgīs eat by themselves in a place apart. The lowest of the untouchable castes are not admitted to the main sections of Chaitanya temples, but the outskirts of the sacred courtyards are open to them. The upper grade of the depressed classes have access to the courtyard, and some of them to more important sections. The inner enclosure, however, is generally reserved for the Brāhmans; especially in Brāhman temples.

Ākhṛā Worship

Besides the daily worship in the temple in which all may join, whether lay or priest, there is the individual worship enjoined upon those who have turned from worldly pursuits and have devoted themselves to religion. It is hardly accurate to call it ākhṛā worship,

for there may be devout householders who give themselves to it with as much devotion as does the vairāgī. I use the term roughly to designate the ritual followed by all those whose main interest is the life of devotion. There are elaborate directions given for the worship of all such. One wonders how many attempt to follow them in full. The morning worship is divided into three parts: the worship of the guru, the worship of Chaitanya and his companions, and the worship of Kṛishṇa, with whom is usually associated Rādhā.

It takes place after the morning bath, every act from rising up to that point having been accompanied by appropriate mantras. Indispensable preliminaries are the putting on of the tilak, the sect-mark, on the forehead, and the twelve marks on the various parts of the body, as detailed in describing the initiation of a vairāgī. These marks are usually made with a creamy paste, called *gopīchandana*, a particular kind of clay obtained from a tank near Mathurā associated with the Kṛishṇa stories. Often in addition, footprints of Kṛishṇa or the name Hari Kṛishṇa, may be stamped all over the body. Special metal stamps are used for this purpose. To complete the preliminaries, garlands offive sorts—the tulsī *mālā* always an essential—are put on. Without the tilaks and garlands the pūjā is fruitless.

The worshipper now meditates according to directions, upon his guru in all his glory as "the very heart of Gaur" (Chaitanya), and conceives of himself as a slave paying devout homage to him. Into a receptacle representing the guru the following are offered:

Pādya	..	Water for washing the feet.
Argha	..	A bit of rice and durba grass.
Gandha	..	Scents.
Pūshpa	..	Flowers.
Dhūpa	..	Burning incense.
Naivedya	..	Rice, fruits, sweets.
Pānīyajalam	..	Drinking water.
Āchamanīyam	..	Water for rinsing the mouth.
Tambūlam	..	Betel.
Gandhamālyam	..	Scented garland.
Pūshpāñjali	..	Handful of flowers.

Holy water only may be used in place of these things. (It is the custom, it seems, to make the offerings to the guru after the conclusion of the whole pūjā. This is more convenient, since Kṛishṇa's prasāda can be offered to the guru, but not *vice versa*.) Prayer is made to the guru, invoking his aid, and a Vaishṇava imitation of the Gāyatrī is repeated. Then with complete dedication of self the worshipper adores three generations of gurus—his guru's guru, his guru's guru's guru and that guru's guru!

The same process is then repeated with Chaitanya as the object of worship. The offerings above, with three additional,

are made, and the Gāyatrī, "I know Chaitanya; I meditate on Viśvambhar; may the knowledge of Gaur be revealed unto me," is repeated several times. Then follows a prayer, "I have fallen into an ocean of misery in this world and have been caught in the clutches of passion. I have been made a prisoner of bad desires. I am shelterless. Grant me the shelter of Thy feet, O Chaitanya Chandra." A hymn and *praṇāma* (obeisance) closes this part of the pūjā.

Nityānanda and Advaita, the two prabhūs (masters) then receive worship in exactly the same manner, except that no prayer is offered to them. Gadādhar and Śrivāsa (close companions of Chaitanya) follow suit, and then the āratī (waving of lights) and pranāma are vouchsafed to all.

Now begins the Kṛishṇa worship, preceded by meditation upon the beauties of Brindāban. Kṛishṇa is meditated upon as surrounded by the gopīs, then Rādhā is meditated upon. They are both worshipped together, in the order detailed above for Chaitanya, except the prayer. The water in which the feet of the image has been washed is drunk with a mantra, and also poured on the head, as a great charm against disease and untimely death. This is the brief form of Kṛishṇa pūjā.

The longer form, which is enjoined as more efficacious, calls for more elaborate preparation. In addition to the offerings mentioned, there must be a special mixture, called *madhuparka*, made of honey, curds, ghee, sugar and water; a conch for pouring water over the body must be in proper position and saluted with pranāma. A fresh cloth and sacred thread are also offered. Following the offerings, the āratī and circumambulation are performed with prayer and pranāma. The images are then put to bed with a mantra.

There seems to be no official or authorized Chaitanya mantra used in his worship. Doubtless there is a Gaurāṅga mantra used by vairāgīs; for they have always desired such. But most Gosvāmīs of authority have opposed a separate mantra, and in the authoritative literature of the sect there is no such mantra given. The Rādhā-Kṛishṇa mantra is used for Gaurāṅga worship; on the theory that all worship of Gaurāṅga is really worship of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa, whose incarnation he is.

With variations in detail, according to the manuals or traditions followed, the above may be taken as the ritual which is supposed to be followed in the daily morning worship of the vairāgī. It has been taken from a cheap and popular manual in Sanskrit, called *Bhogmālāvivaraṇa*, which is largely used throughout Bengal.

The rather elaborate ceremonial set forth above is not necessarily to be followed literally. It is to be observed mentally at least, whether the worshipper has all the required offerings by him or not. He is to use what he has and imagine the rest. The *Haribhakti-vilāsa* enjoins that full ritual be observed in the temple worship, but in private devotions considerable leeway is allowed. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* lays down the principle that the chief end of worship is not the outward act, but the emotion of the heart. However, for the full bliss of communion it is maintained that the full order of worship as outlined is essential in Vaidhi bhakti, or active devotion. The simple worship of Kṛishṇa or Chaitanya alone is not sufficient.

The above order is the chief formal act of worship of the day, but it by no means exhausts the day's requirements. Four times a day, according to the *Haribhaktivilāsa*,[1] there must be a worship of song: morning, noon, evening and midnight. Selections of hymns from the great mass of Vaishṇava songs are arranged for this purpose. Then there are the various operations for the care of the image, which are to be observed in an ākhṛā just as in the temple, and the *sāyana*, or retiring āratī, to conclude the day.

In many small ākhṛās where the inmates are few, and probably in most of them, the full worship indicated above is hardly observed in detail. It is more likely reserved for special days. The ordinary routine of one simple ākhṛā has been described to me as follows:

The details of the early morning routine, after rising from bed, are all accompanied by appropriate mantras, including the bath and the marking of the body as given above.[2] Without a clean cloth the vairāgī may not enter the *ṭhākurghar*, the room where the images are kept. Failing this, he must enter wearing the wet cloth in which he has bathed. (If by reason of sickness, etc., he is unable to take a bath, he may bathe by mantra!) The god is awakened from sleep by

[1] Chapter XX.

[2] The preparation used for this is called *mṛittikā*, and is made by mixing earth with unboiled milk, water in which the image has been bathed, gopīchandana, tulsī leaves and Ganges water.

sounding the conch and the gong while a mantra is repeated. The vairāgī then goes out to gather flowers and tulsī leaves for the day's worship. On certain days this is forbidden, on Sunday, *Āmāvasyā* (new moon day), *Pūrṇimā* (full moon), and *Ekādaśī* (eleventh day of the lunar month). On these days the supply gathered on the previous day must suffice. The plucking of the tulsī leaves is accompanied by a mantra and three hand-claps. Certain flowers are avoided as poison, such as the *javā* and *bel* leaves, which are used generally in the worship of the Śākta sect. Only indigenous flowers are used in worship. No blossom, however charming, from a foreign plant in milady's garden could find a place in the service of the god. The first food offering (*bālyabhog*) is then presented to the image. Later it is bathed and marked with gopīchandana and earth, and decorated with flowers. From the bath water a preparation is made by adding camphor, white sandalwood, tulsī leaves and flowers. This is called *chāraṇāmṛita* (nectar of the feet) and is prized by visitors, who put it on their heads and drink of it. After the *dhūpāratī*, the waving with one hand of a pot of burning incense before the god, while ringing a small bell with the other hand, the mid-day meal is offered, and following upon this the image is put to rest for his siesta.

At this time the rosary of tulsī beads, which is used for the repetition of the sacred names, is bathed in tulsī water, with a mantra, and reverenced with flower offerings. In the evening another meal is offered, and then water for washing the feet is brought and that action gone through in pantomime. Āratī follows, both the incense burning described above, now done for the third time during the day, and the *pañchbāti*, which is the waving of a little figure of Jasoda, the mother of Kṛishṇa, holding five wicks or candles before the image to the accompaniment of a bell. Considerable time is given in the evening to the telling of the tulsī beads, a form of Harināma, the repetition of Hari's name. Later in the evening another food offering is made, and then the god is put to sleep for the night. A pillow is provided for this, with a mosquito net for the hot season and a quilt for the cold months.

But even this is too elaborate a programme to ascribe to many a present-day vairāgī, living in an ākhṛā composed of himself and a female companion only and unconnected with a shrine. The ritual of their worship is reduced to a minimum. Repetition of their own secret mantra on first arising, elaborate care with the tilaks, brief worship of whatever images they possess, and the *japmālā*, the use of the beads—these make up the main features of their day's worship. Very few, I fancy, observe the full order of worship of the morning, as outlined above. A repetition of the guru, Gaurāṅga and Kṛishṇa mantras, with flower

offerings, takes its place. As most of the vairāgīs can neither read nor write, they are innocent of manuals of ritual. Their begging rounds are made early in the day, and are completed before the bath and the succeeding acts of worship are undertaken. As for the vairāgiṇī, her secret mantra, repeated over and over, and the telling of the beads, seem to be her principal forms of worship. From the aspect of many of these mendicants, one could hardly believe them to be eaten up with zeal for the house of the Lord. Rather they seem too often to be chiefly desirous of ease in Zion. Too much worship, doubtless, seems to them as injudicious as too much work.

Domestic Worship

While in many points the domestic worship is naturally parallel to that of ākhṛā and temple, still it deserves consideration by itself. The hold upon the home is the real test of any sect. Worship carried on there has a different meaning, and a greater significance, than that of temple or ākhṛā. In the ordinary household of any means the formal worship is performed by a household priest, who comes in daily for the purpose. He is sometimes the pūjārī of a temple in the vicinity, but usually only a member of the Purohita class (hereditary priests). He probably serves several other households in the same capacity. Strange to say, he is not necessarily a Vaishṇava, although usually a pūjārī of a Vaishṇava sect would naturally be chosen for household priest in a Vaishṇava home. All that seems to be vitally essential is that he shall know the mantras used in the Kṛishṇa pūjā. In one devout Vaishṇava home of which I know, the household priest is the pūjārī of a Kālī temple in the town, and yet his service of Śrī Kṛishṇa in the household shrine does not seem less acceptable thereby.[1] In many cases the household priest has no connection with a temple, but devotes himself entirely

[1] The reason usually given in such cases is that a Brāhman is by birth a Vaishṇava, whatever may be his secondary religious profession!

to this household service. He receives a small cash remuneration from each household according to its means, in addition to a part or all of the daily offerings, and sometimes also the income from a small parcel of ground.

Each household possesses a small shrine, called the ṭhākurghar, the house of the god, where the image or images worshipped by the family are kept. This is usually situated in the courtyard, entirely separate from the living rooms of the house. Twice a day the household priest, or some member of his family, if he is a Brāhman, visits the shrine. The main service is about nine a.m., when the *pūjaka*[1] conducts worship with mantras and flower offerings and presents food (bhoga) to the god. In the evening there is no worship save the āratī, waving of lights, after which the image is laid to rest for the night. The number of images housed in the shrine varies in different parts of the country. In Navadvīp and the surrounding country, where the memory of Chaitanya is a potent influence, images of himself and Nityānanda (the Gaur-Nitāi) are usually found, in addition to those of Kṛishṇa and Rādhā. A *śālagrāma* (a round black stone, traditionally used as an emblem of Vishṇu) is almost always to be found with the images. In Sylhet generally, I am informed, and this holds true of the Dacca district as well, neither the Gaur-Nitāi nor Chaitanya are commonly found nowadays in the household shrines of Vaishṇavas. Their pictures hang on the wall instead, and to them obeisance is made during worship.

It must not be thought that the morning worship performed by the priest is a sort of general service attended by all the household, something in the fashion of the family prayers of a Christian home. It is nothing of the kind. In the first place, the ṭhākurghar is a small place usually, not intended for general worship; and secondly, the worship is a purely formal

[1] A *pūjaka* may be anyone who conducts the worship without pay; the *pūjārī* is one who is paid for regularly carrying on the worship of an image.

affair, a recognition on behalf of the family of the god of the household. The one way in which the whole household is brought together in a semblance of common worship is at the evening āratī when all are supposed to gather in the courtyard before the shrine to witness the waving of the lights. At the conclusion all bow to the god. In another sense all members of the household do share in the morning worship carried on by the pūjaka. They all partake of the prasāda, the food which has been offered to the image. The widows of the family make their one solid meal of the day from this food, and the other members all take a little of it. On special days all food is offered, and thus made prasāda. Apart from these common acts of worship, the personal devotions of the members of the household vary according to sex, age, and religious inclination.

The following is a literal account, given by a Vaishṇava gentleman himself, of the daily worship in his house. It should be understood that the man is possessed of some means, and has devoted himself and his household to the service of his religion. This account cannot, therefore, be taken as representative of the average home; it illustrates rather the extreme of devotion in a home where the god's *sevā* (service) is made the chief business of the day.

Everyone rises between four and five a.m., and baths are taken considerably before sunrise. Then the lady of the house sweeps the ṭhākurghar and the children gather flowers for the worship. The man of the house gathers the tulsī leaves after his bath. Tilaks are then put on, and the householder wakes the god, worships him, and decorates him with flowers. The morning āratī is then performed. This is the waving of five lights (wicks moistened with ghee, not ordinary oil) with a circular motion of the hand, four times before the feet, twice before the navel, and once before the face, then seven times before the whole body—fourteen times in all. All the while the bell is rung with the other hand. The āratī saṅkīrtan is then sung, and the same waving process is gone through with the pot of burning incense, called the dhūpāratī. After the āratī is performed, the householder sits down for his morning pūjā, which is followed by reading from the śāstras until about ten a.m. Then he takes another bath. The lady of the house now prepares the food and the householder presents it to the god, while the children offer incense and ring

the bells. The whole household joins in saṅkīrtan with drums and cymbals, which concludes the food offering. Now follows the mid-day āratī (as described), and then prasāda is taken by the whole family, the full meal being made from the prasāda. This is over about one p.m. The household now sits down and listens to the reading of the Vaishṇava scriptures, such as the *Chaitanya Bhāgavata* or the *Charitāmṛita*, until about three p.m. Then japmālā, the telling of beads, is practised until dusk, when a third bath is taken. Then comes the evening āratī, after which saṅkīrtan continues until about ten p.m. Food is then presented to the god and the household has its evening meal from the prasāda. All then retire, to arise at four o'clock the next morning to resume the same programme.

I have omitted to add to the above the worship of the tulsī, which takes place thrice daily—morning, noon and night—in what is called *pradakshiṇ*, circumambulating the tulsī plant, all the while keeping the right shoulder towards it. On festival days special arrangements are made, the saṅkīrtans are on a grander scale, and the food is better and more of it. On such days prasāda is given to all who come.

The daily worship of men in the Vaishṇava household varies considerably. In the Vaishṇava home of one of my students, the father, being a Brāhman, follows the traditional requirements for a Brāhman's *sandhyā*, *i.e.* daily prayers; he observes no specially Vaishṇava practices whatever in his private devotions. He has a private room for his devotions in which there are no images, and he does not go near the ṭhākurghar. When not at worship, the reading of the Vaishṇava scriptures is the chief occupation of his leisure time. In another home described to me, the male member who devotes the most time to worship, rises from his bed with the repetition of Kṛishṇa's name, which continues until the bath. Considerable time is spent at the bath in the ritual connected therewith. After the bath he enters the ṭhākurghar for the morning worship. This consists of the repetion of one's secret mantra, and more or less of the ritual stated above for the worship of the guru, Chaitanya and Kṛishṇa. If rainy weather has curtailed the bath ceremonial, a longer time is spent in the ṭhākurghar. After this worship is over, another form of Harināma is resorted to, namely, the writing of the

sacred name. In this case, the things of the West being eschewed, the writing is done on fresh palm leaves with a sharp-pointed piece of bamboo. Ordinarily, paper is used, and sometimes a slate. This act of worship and merit may go on in the midst of conversation. A second bath takes place at midday, after which flowers are offered in the ṭhākurghar and some prasāda is taken. In the evening a third bath occurs, rather more ceremonial than cleansing, and clean clothes are put on before the evening worship. From all I can gather, the use of the beads, japmālā, has very largely dropped out of the practice of ordinary Vaishṇava laymen in Bengal. Elderly men still use them, and here and there younger men can be found who maintain the custom, but on the whole the practice has greatly declined. With many men, practically the only personal worship of the day is the repetition of one's secret mantra after the morning bath. As this involves the name of Kṛishṇa, it serves as Harināma. In addition, there may be a mantra to the guru and to Rādhā-Kṛishṇa, but the practice in this respect varies greatly. In humbler households, where no priest is employed for the formal worship of the god, the head of the family usually makes the presentation of food.

The women of the household, as in most countries, devote more time than men to the daily worship. Their first work in the day is the cleansing of the ṭhākurghar, and the mound on which grows a bit of tulsī plant, with *lep*, a mixture of cow dung and water, everywhere used in Bengal. The shrine has already been opened by some member of the family, and the god aroused from sleep by clapping of the hands or ringing of a gong or a bell. One of my students tells me that this act is invariably performed in his family by the grandmother. The morning bath is taken early with mantras, but the women as a rule do not mark the body as do the men. Harināma is performed after the bath, the rosary of beads being very commonly used among the women. A student tells me of a vivid memory of his grandmother chanting the name of Kṛishṇa as she came from

the bath. Following the bath is the morning worship, which for most women consists of sitting alone in the ṭhākurghar, for a half hour or so, repeating their secret mantra. The flowers used in the morning worship by the priest are usually gathered by the women folk at this time, and they also prepare the sandal paste required for the flower offerings. The food offered to the god is prepared by one of the elderly females of the household. At noon the beads are taken down from their resting place, out of the reach of inquisitive child fingers, for a period of Harināma, the repetition of the divine name. Often they are washed and worshipped with flowers at this time, although this is not universal. In the evening again the beads are told for a longer time, widows especially spending much time in this form of devotion. The important act of the evening, after the ceremony of the lights, attended by all, is the placing of the lamp before the tulsī plant in the courtyard. An invariable object in every Vaishṇava home is this little mound of earth, on the top of which is kept growing a sprig of the sacred tulsī. Near the top of the mound is a little niche, where a tiny clay saucer is placed nightly, its shallow depth filled with mustard oil and a piece of cloth added for a wick. In wealthier homes ghee is used instead of mustard oil. The mound is cleansed with lep before lighting, even if it has been so cleansed in the morning. In homes where no household priest is employed, the evening āratī, the waving of lights, is often performed by the mother.

Young girls perform no pūjā at all. They wash or sweep the tulsī mound in the morning, while the older woman is cleansing the god's house, and they help in picking flowers for use in the worship, but they do no worship themselves. If the gathering of flowers requires leaving the home, girls do not go. No girl is initiated before her marriage ; and in the eyes of Hinduism she worships only with and through her husband. The boys of a family are supposed to perform sandhyā from the time of their initiation.

In one humble and devout home known to me, where the mother is a widow, her principal form of worship for the day consists of pouring water on the tulsī plant after her bath, and then, after putting on the twelve tilaks, sitting before a water-pot, in which a tulsī leaf has been placed, in silent repetition of her secret mantra. In conclusion obeisance is made to the water. The water in the pot represents the sacred water of the Ganges. This instance represents a case where the body marks are used by a woman not of the vairāgiṇī class. No image is used in this worship, and she does not even possess the familiar tulsī beads.

Veneration of the tulsī plant is kept up in a home when practically every other mark of Vaishṇavism may have vanished. At the hour of death, in a Vaishṇava home, the dying person is brought into the courtyard and laid by the tulsī plant, that the last breath may be breathed near its sacred leaves. Given this sense of reverence, it is not strange that its leaves should be considered to possess medicinal value and be used in this way. Wise speaks of the "Veneration of trees" as "one of the latest outgrowths of corrupt Vaishṇavism."[1] The reference is doubtless to the tulsī plant, but we may be allowed to doubt the lateness of the custom. It is widespread in north India among all Vaishṇava sects, and is embedded even in Brāhman ritual.[2] Certainly the practice long antedates the movement with which we are concerned.

In the village of Dhamrāi, in the Dacca district, a noted Vaishṇava centre, the writer observed a use of the tulsī plant which seemed to be a village parallel to the rôle which it plays in the home. Under a great spreading tree in the centre of the village, on a platform, was a small mound, in the shape of three steps surmounted by the tulsī plant. The nightly tending of the light was undertaken by the shopkeepers in the neighbourhood.

[1] *Notes on the Races, Castes, and Trades of E. Bengal*, p. 137.
[2] Stevenson, *Rites of the Twice Born*, see Index under "Tulasī."

Something more, perhaps, should be said of the practice of Harināma, which forms so prominent a part of the individual worship of the good Vaishṇava. While the custom, known as *japa*, is a very old one in Hinduism, it may be said to be particularly characteristic of the Bengal Vaishṇavas. Its prominence in the sect is clearly due to Chaitanya's own practice of chanting the name of Kṛishṇa and his repeated emphasis upon its great efficacy. It is an utterly unritualistic practice, available to the poorest and the most ignorant. Doubtless, this is just why Chaitanya chose to make it one requirement of his school of bhakti. There are absolutely no ceremonial requirements in connection with it. It can be practised anywhere, at any time, in any condition. The rosary of tulsī beads, already known to earlier Vaishṇava sects, became a great adjunct of the movement and has always been widely used. Its use is similar to that of the rosary among Roman Catholic Christians, and is designed to facilitate the repetition of the divine name. The ordinary rosary is composed of 108 beads, made from the wood of the tulsī, although the author of *Bengal Peasant Life* is authority for the statement, that he himself had seen a rosary consisting of 100,000 beads![1] All Vaishṇavas are supposed to use the beads after bathing in the morning and at their prayers; nor are they supposed to eat or drink without one round of the beads. But, as we have seen, the practice has fallen on evil days. Formerly the rosary could be counted an index of Vaishṇava piety. It was a familiar sight and not reserved for the home only. It was a means of devotion which, like the prayer-wheel one sees in the hands of the hill men in Darjeeling, could be used at all times and places.

> Expert Vaishṇavas, veterans in the service of nāmakīrtan, can manage very often to serve God and mammon at the same time. They may be seen listening to a conversation and taking their part in it, and at the same time engaged in counting their beads.[2]

The particular mantra used for Harināma, and known as the Harināma mantra, is of great popularity because

[1] *Calcutta Review*, Vol. XV, p. 194. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 194.

of its having been used by Chaitanya himself. Its 16 names and 32 syllables are chanted over and over again. It is as follows:

Hare Kṛishṇa, Hare Kṛishṇa, Kṛishṇa, Kṛishṇa, Hare, Hare,
Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma, Rāma, Hare, Hare.

One of the great stories of Vaishṇava devotion will always be that of Haridāsa, the convert from Islam, who is believed to have performed Harināma to the number of three lakhs daily.

Public Worship

We have still to consider the wider uses of the most characteristic feature of the sect, namely the saṅkīrtan. We have seen that it forms a part of the worship in large temples, but this is by no means its natural habitat. It did not have its origin in the temple, but in the open. It was not the product of priestcraft for the adornment of ritual, but sprang into being as the expression of group emotion. So to-day it is most natural and at its best in the open, and is to be found wherever Vaishṇavas congregate. It is essentially a mode of public or group worship, because it is a natural expression of the aroused religious feelings of the crowd. This is true, whether the saṅkīrtan is conducted by a famous singer with trained chorus about him, or whether it is more of the nature of a village sing-song, with everyone joining in according to his vocal capacity.

We have noticed in a previous chapter how the popularity of the kīrtan has kept alive a class of professional singers, who do nothing but conduct kīrtans for a livelihood. Their services are in demand on public occasions, at large gatherings of Vaishṇavas, and for smaller parties in private houses. Their power over an Indian audience is remarkable. This form of the kīrtan is still a very real feature of Vaishṇavism in Bengal. Let us turn for a description of it to the pen of one, oft quoted already, who loves to linger on the ravishing cadences of his country's singers:

The *gaurachandrikā* (the singing of songs about Chaitanya) prepares a spiritual atmosphere for the audience. The emotions of one who was mad after God are emphasized, so that they might serve as a keynote to Rādhā-Krishṇa songs. . . . When the kīrtaniyā, or head singer of the kīrtan-songs, takes up a subject for his night's performance, he selects as many songs of a group as he can sing, within six or seven, and commences with a gaurachandrikā descriptive of the particular emotion which is the subject of the night.

The clang of kartāla (cymbals) and the dull beat of khole, which has, however, a heart-moving effect, is continued for some time. The deafening noise drives away all other thoughts, and the audience expectantly looks for some higher music. Gaurachandrikā is next introduced. The singer does not consider his task finished by singing the songs. Each line—each word of them—he explains by rhymed commentaries made by some earlier master, which was also learnt by rote by the singer when he committed the songs to memory. The poetical import of each word is analyzed, with its bearing on Chaitanya's life, till history, theology and poetry are mingled together, and the musical flow of the whole makes the audience rapt. Kīrtana is unlike all other music. It is a continual source of inspiration in Bengal, owing to the great life of Chaitanya, which nourishes it with idealistic poetry. . . . The music around the gaurachandrikā swells and grows in volume, till, like the sea, it surrounds the audience, separating themselves from the visible world. It leads them to a superior plane, creating pathos which draws from their eyes silent tears of exalted emotions.

It often happens that some one amongst the audience, unable to support his emotion, silently joins the singers and dances for joy. I have seen good scholars do so. In fact, the attention of the audience is captivated to such an extent that they are often found to forget their dinner-hour and the most urgent business.[1]

But true and important a feature as this is, the phase of the kīrtan more truly characteristic of the sect is the humbler but more general community chorus, to whose resounding peals everyone contributes his share. Doubtless this feature of Vaishṇava life in Bengal has lost something of its early fervour and the remarkable power that made it so effective a revival agency in Chaitanya's hands. But it still remains central in the communal life of the sect. The saṅkīrtan is the heart of any gathering of Vaishṇavas. It needs to be seen to be understood, but even then it is difficult for a Westerner to fully appreciate its immense influence upon the feelings of a crowd. The following is a description of

[1] *C.C.*, pp. 193-95.

the saṅkīrtan, by one well qualified by sympathy and understanding to write of it:[1]

To outsiders kīrtan may seem to be a noisy and artificial affair. It is so when there is no bhakti in the heart. But when there is bhakti the kīrtan is a celestial enjoyment with power of purification. Men sit together with musical instruments for the purpose of chanting the praise of the lord, who is good, kind and disinterestedly affectionate. The music in the beginning soothes the soul, and prepares it to receive the pious sentiments which the hymn contains. Nay, it also has the power of evoking such sentiments in the heart. The music and sentiments in the song move the heart. When one of the party is moved, others are also moved, by the mysterious law of sympathy. The whole party is then saturated with pious feelings.

In this manner the individuals of the party help one another, for when one is thus influenced by bhakti, he imparts the feeling to others. Gradually the members are filled with joy, and they cannot resist the impulse to express it by dancing. To make this dance in every way agreeable the performers wear musical anklets.

To describe the kīrtan in this manner is, however, to do scant justice to it, for words can never convey the wonderful effect it produces upon the human mind. Strong-minded saints go into the wilderness and live in caves, with a view to learn how to concentrate the mind and direct it on God. A kīrtan enables a man to do the same thing in spite of himself, and that without undergoing mortification, nay, by merely singing and dancing. People feel it an impossible task to subdue their passions, they weep and beat their breasts to deliver themselves from the sins that they have committed, but a kīrtan enables them to do both the one and the other. And thus says Vāsudeva, a chronicler of the lord's doings: "My lord Gaurāṅga purifies men by making them sing and dance."

Yes, it is good to join a kīrtan party, it is also good to witness it. For who can look at the faces of the bhaktas beaming with bhakti, their bodies gracefully waving to and fro under its influence, their fearful eyes red with love, and not be affected by the sight?

I have quoted thus at length, because these passages so ingenuously reveal the reason why the saṅkīrtan is so valued and why it maintains its attraction. Emotional intoxication is the end sought after, and it is the tremendous powers of group stimulus, contagion and suggestion in the saṅkīrtan that makes it popular.

The saṅkīrtan is resorted to on many different occasions. It forms the main item in the programme of any festival. It is a familiar feature of a Vaishṇava melā. It is the natural expression of community feeling

[1] *Gaurāṅga*, Vol. I, pp. 125, 234-35.

on special pūjā days. It is a vital part of the mahotsava, the special celebration which is a common feature of Vaishṇava communities. It is the one means, perhaps, by which the inhabitants of many village ākhṛās come into communal touch with their fellow villagers. The vairāgīs often are specialists in saṅkīrtan, and their evenings devoted to this art draw the community together in what might almost be called village "choral unions" in the West. In the home also the saṅkīrtan may take a prominent place. A music-loving man will gather the neighbourhood into his courtyard at frequent intervals, and there devote long hours of the night to the singing of the familiar songs of the Chaitanya poets. During such a community saṅkīrtan, custom forbids the passing of the doorway without entering and joining in the service of common praise.

The capacity of Vaishṇava folk for this form of worship is amazing. We read of the saṅkīrtan, among the villages of the Bankura district, as being the chief amusement of the people; "sometimes continued without intermission for several days and nights, and is called, according to its duration, *ahorātra* (one day and night), *chobbisprahar* (three days and nights), *pancharātra* (five days and nights), and *nabarātra* (nine days and nights)."[1] We hear even of a Nadia village where the saṅkīrtan has been kept up every night for 400 years.

The reason of this is that Chaitanya had once paid a visit to that village before taking sannyāsa. The little village resounded with kīrtana songs, proclaiming its gladness at the event. When he was about to leave the place the villagers begged him to pay them a visit again, and Chaitanya, it is said, promised that he would do so at some future time. They formed from amongst themselves two bands of kīrtana singers to keep up the continuity of songs till he returned. That blessed day never came. But they have kept up an unceasing flow of music night after night, during these long generations, believing that he will come once more and visit their village. For the word of one whom they knew to be God himself could not but be fulfilled.[2]

I have heard of a ten years' continuous saṅkīrtan in Sylhet, still going on, but I have never verified this.

[1] *Bankura Gazetteer*, pp. 67-68. [2] *C.C.*, pp. 197-98.

Such uses of the saṅkīrtan, although this particular instance is an extreme case, are not altogether unknown. A man vows a saṅkīrtan for a certain time, as a work of merit, and then enlists his friends and neighbours in carrying out the performance. All-day saṅkīrtans are common enough on festival days. In times of epidemic it seems that saṅkīrtans are resorted to in some parts. In Dhamrāi, near Dacca, whenever the place is visited or threatened by an epidemic of any kind, it is the custom to hold an all-day-and-night saṅkīrtan, together with a mahotsava, the general feast. The mahotsava is of quite frequent occurrence, especially during the cold season, and this is always the occasion for a saṅkīrtan. These occasions are not altogether optional nor spontaneous as to participation in them. They are organised by the Gosvāmīs of the community, and all vairāgīs thereabouts are expected to attend.

On special occasions the saṅkīrtan easily takes the form of the nagarkīrtan, the processional kīrtan, in which bands of singers with their instruments, accompanied by waving banners, parade the streets. This method is employed at the annual celebration of Chaitanya's birthday in Calcutta. Saṅkīrtan parties start from various sections of the northern part of the city and converge in a selected public square, where they unite in a big saṅkīrtan. On a smaller scale the same thing may be seen in many villages on pūjā days.

Festivals

The festivals of the Chaitanya sect are those of the Vaishṇavas generally, with the addition of Chaitanya's birthday. As this falls on the occasion of the *Dolajātrā* it does not add a fresh festival. The principal festivals of the Bengal Vaishṇavas are briefly as follows.[1] The Dolajātrā is celebrated usually at full moon in the month of Phālguna (February-March). It commemorates a

[1] For a handy volume treating briefly of these and other pūjā days, the reader is referred to a Government publication, *Hindu and Muhammadan Feasts*, 1914.

feat of Śrī Kṛishṇa's in killing a she-devil; the chief features of the festivity are the swinging of the image of Kṛishṇa, and the ubiquitous *ābīra*, red powder. As Chaitanya was born at the time of the full moon in Phālguna, the celebration of his birthday coincides with the Dolajātrā festivities. In Navadvīp, naturally, this occasion receives most attention. A three or four days' melā is held, and special effort made to draw pilgrims to the sacred shrines. A four or five days' *parikrama*, a circumambulating pilgrimage touching points round about Navadvīp connected in any way with Chaitanya's life, is one of the features of the celebration. All Chaitanya temples celebrate this day as of greatest sanctity. In Calcutta during recent years an effort has been made to observe Chaitanya's birthday as a public event. One of the public squares of the city is requisitioned for the day, and public saṅkīrtan and notable speakers are advertised by handbills.

The *Jhulana jātrā* occurs in the month of Śrāvaṇa (July-August). The chief point of the festival is the nightly swinging of the images of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa in a specially-prepared swing. This festival is observed with considerable display at Ḍhākkādakshin, in Sylhet. An all-day-and-night saṅkīrtan is held, and large numbers of pilgrims are sumptuously fed.

Janmāshṭamī, the anniversary of Kṛishṇa's birth, is celebrated on the eighth lunar day in the dark fortnight of the month of Bhādra (August-September). This is one of the most important festival days of Hinduism, and is observed by all Vaishṇavas with fasting.

Rādhāshṭamī, the birthday of Rādhā, falls in the same month of Bhādra. It is not so generally celebrated.

The *Rās jātrā*, celebrated in the month of Kārtik (October-November), is a popular festival. It commemorates the story of Kṛishṇa's dance with the gopīs. It continues for three nights, with jātrās and dancing for the crowds.

The *Ratha jātrā*, or car festival, commemorating the journey of Kṛishṇa from Gokula to Mathurā, where he killed the demon king Kaṁsa, is probably the chief

Vaishṇava festival in Bengal. Every village has its small car, while in certain places, like Dhamrāi, near Dacca, Mahesh and Ballabhpur, near Serampore, huge cars are maintained and the festival is celebrated with great pomp. At the famous temple of Jagannāth, in Purī, this is the crowning festivity of the year.

Preceding this festival by fifteenth days is the *Snāna jātrā*, which is observed usually whenever the ratha jātrā is. This is a popular occasion, because the bathing and dressing of the gods takes place in the open, on a platform, where all can follow the proceedings.

Melās and Mahotsavas

A melā is an Indian fair. But, unlike the village fairs of the West, which are largely agricultural, an Indian melā is almost always concerned with some religious celebration. However, it is a real fair, and serves the people of the countryside with opportunities for shopping as well as with amusement. The mahotsava, as we have had occasion to note already, is a grand feast on a sumptuous scale of all Vaishṇavas in a community. Many gatherings are called by this name, because the central feature of the celebration is a mahotsava organised by the temple sevāits or the Gosvāmīs in commemoration of the birth or death of some well-known Vaishṇava worthy. The gathering may continue for days, and in all its features is the same as a melā. Naturally these gatherings are the favourite resort of the mendicant members of the sect, and of all and sundry. I quote a vivid description of one of these melās from a familiar source:[1]

> Vairāgīs, Bāuls, Nāgās and Neṛīs, in their grotesque habiliments were all there, the music of the khol or mṛidanga and of the kartala was heard day and night. They sang the praise of Gopināth in merry groups through the village. They danced with wild excitement. They shouted the names of Rādhā and Kṛishṇa till their throats became hoarse; they foamed at the mouth; they turned religious somersaults; men and women danced together promiscuously, the latter excelling the former in the violence of their gestures; many

[1] Dey, *Bengal Peasant Life*, pp. 231 ff.

mridangas and kartalas were broken through violence of striking; and many women had fits of devotional fainting. The excitement among the pilgrims—and their number was above fifty thousand—was immense.

. . . they were attracted to one particular group (of mendicant Vaishṇavas), where the music and the singing were more vociferous and the dancing more violent than the rest. There was one actor on this scene to whom every eye was turned, partly on account of the violence of the music—if music that could be called which was dissonance itself—which his kartala sent forth and partly on account of the vehemence of his devotional dance. He was in a state of primitive nudity, save and except a small bit of rag called kaupin; a red cone-shaped cap was on his head; and his neck was encircled with a threefold bead roll. He was singing, dancing and shouting at a tremendous rate; now falling to the ground, now jumping up, and now twisting his body in varied contortions as if in convulsions; in a word, he was conducting himself in such a manner that any one not acquainted with the manners of the Vaishṇavas would think that the man had gone "daft." But the madder a Vaishṇava is, the holier he is deemed by the people.

There are more than fifty of these Vaishṇava celebrations in Bengal listed in the Bengali almanac. It is more than likely that there are many more unlisted. To these should be added the large number of similar events held annually in the villages of Orissa. All these melās represent the popular life of the sect. They are the gathering place of the people; to a certain extent, at least, the number and size of these melās are a gauge of the place of the sect in the lives of the common people.

Many of these celebrations are local events, having to do with anniversaries of no widespread interest or significance. But the principle melās are of longstanding, having been celebrated through the centuries from the beginning of the movement. Many of them commemorate the birth or death of the leading figures of the sect, or of Vaishṇavas like the poet Jayadeva, at whose birthplace at Kenduli, in the Burdwan district, an annual festival is held which draws thousands of people. These celebrations vary from one or two days to two weeks in duration, and in the case of the larger ones are attended by throngs of pilgrims. The chief among these melās at the present time are those held at

Navadvīp, Bāghnāpāṛa, Kheturi, Agradvīp and Pānihāti. Until within recent years Kardaha was also the scene of an historic melā, commemorating the admission into the sect of the Buddhist mendicants.

The mahotsava is a characteristic feature of current Vaishṇavism that merits a word. We have had occasion to mention it particularly in connection with the death of vairāgīs. There, as we have seen, it takes the place of the śrāddha ceremony. But in this connection it is not a very grand affair; indeed, it may involve only a a few vairāgīs and very limited fare. In its original sense the mahotsava had something of the grand manner about it. It was a truly great celebration, at which food was served on a sumptuous scale. The historical account of such an affair best known to us is that of the great mahotsava at Kheturi, when the temple to Chaitanya was founded there in the early years of the seventeenth century. To this occasion were invited literally all the Vaishṇavas in Bengal of any standing, and all the resources of a well-known rāj were laid under tribute for entertainment.

More elaborate mahotsavas are possible only to wealthy establishments, or when some householder of means makes a special gift to temple or ākhṛā for this particular purpose. On the death of a Gosvāmī, or of a mahant of a well known ākhṛā, the establishments of those worthies are expected to provide the feasts. In case a mahotsava is limited mostly to the disciples and adherents of one Gosvāmī, it is often the custom for the ruling Gosvāmī to take a handful of food first, eat a little, and sprinkle the remainder over the food supplies, thus making it into prasāda.

The picture of the mahotsava, drawn by Dr. Sen[1] as of a public feeding of the poor and destitute, continued with open house by a householder to the point of complete exhaustion of his means, is hardly the celebration as it is known to-day in the sect. This may have been one phase of it as it existed in an earlier day. But as

[1] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 612.

a sect feature it was essentially a fellowship gathering of bhaktas, rather than a distribution of alms to the poor generally. But to-day even the element of free fellowship unhampered by caste lines, which marked the celebrations of an earlier day, is largely lost. Caste lines prevent the feast from being a common meal. Gosvāmīs eat by themselves and vairāgīs by themselves, and if householders are included, they form a third group.

Secret Forms of Worship

The presence among the Chaitanyas of a great many low-caste people, largely if not entirely illiterate, and the almost entire lack of anything like spiritual supervision over them by sect leaders, makes of them a fruitful field for corrupt forms and weird practices. There have always been these elements of corrupt Vaishṇavism in Bengal, and they have usually found their adherents from among the neglected lower ranks. It is difficult to get at the facts about such secret practices, or to ascertain their strength and prevalence in the sect. We can do little more than mention the existence of these groups.

Sahajiyās.

The Sahajiyās were dealt with somewhat in the introductory chapter. We have noted the possible influence of the Sahajiyā theory on the theological development of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa idea. Just what is represented by the actual practice of those who call themselves by this name to-day is not so easy to determine. The main drift of their teaching, however, is not difficult. They oppose the gopī doctrine of Chaitanya and his followers, which makes the bhakta seek to imagine himself a gopī, in the effort to realise within his own heart the passionate devotion which the gopīs felt for Kṛishṇa. With the heart of a woman one must worship, taught Chaitanya. This, the Sahajiyās say, is unnatural. The natural way is to worship with the help of a woman. This is the natural religion

(*sahaja-dharma*) of human passion. The worshipper is to think of himself as Kṛishṇa and is to realise within himself the passion of Kṛishṇa for Rādhā, who is represented by the female companion of his worship. Through sexual passion salvation is to be found. The Rādhā-Kṛishṇa stories are held as the justification of their practices, which are secret and held at night.

Kiśorībhajās.

The Kiśorībhajās, as indicated by their name (maiden worship), are worshippers of and with young maidens. They differ little, if any, from the Sahajiyās in their theory. Participants of both sexes gather at night at designated places for their *bhajan*, worship, spending much of the night in singing Rādhā-Kṛishṇa songs and in Kṛishṇalīlā, *i.e.* imitation of the Kṛishṇa play with the gopīs. Just what the ritual followed consists of is unknown, but the Kiśorībhajās are commonly believed to be little different in practice from the *Vāmāchārīs*, the left-hand Śāktas.[1] Members of higher castes in the community are known to join these meetings, but they do so incognito. The extent of this group is considerable in the more populous Vaishṇava districts. There was a general meeting of Kiśorībhajās held some years ago near Dacca, attended by large numbers. Chaitanya paṇḍits from Brindāban ruled their ideas out of court as heretical, and this led to considerable correspondence in the vernacular papers. This would seem to indicate the existence of many adherents.

Śrī Rūpa Sevā.

This is a secret form reported to me from Sylhet, where it is taught to the villagers by wandering vairāgīs. Those who become initiated receive a second mantra and this teaching, as a higher form of Vaishṇavism. The second mantra is represented as necessary to make operative the latent power of the first, or dīkshā mantra. All this goes on at night, and there

[1] See above pp. 3 and 9.

is something about it that respectable women find repulsive. It seems probable that this is only a variant of the Kiśorībhajā worship.

Neṛā-Neṛīs.

We have already traced the origin of this body, in the movement towards Vaishṇavism of the stranded remnants of the Buddhist mendicant orders. Its connection with Nityānanda or his son, Vīrabhadra, seems clear enough, as was witnessed by the melā held every year until recently at the Kardaha seat of the Nityānanda Gosvāmīs in commemoration of the reception of this group into the Vaishṇava fold. They are particularised in one Vaishṇava work of the period as "Vīrabhadra's Neṛās." All this as to their origin is clear, but what is not so clear is their relation to the Chaitanya sect. Most leaders of the sect would refuse to recognise them as having any connection, now or at any time, with Chaitanya Vaishṇavas. Some maintain that they were organised as a separate mendicant group by Vīrabhadra, and have always continued as such. They certainly are not counted as ordinary vairāgīs of the sect. Dr. Sen seems to consider them as synonymous with the Sahajiyās.[1] In name, at least, they still persist as a distinct group. I am told that at the annual melā held in the village of Bāghnāpāṛa in the month of Māgh (January-February), these people congregate in large numbers.

The truth seems to be that there is little to distinguish these various groups of discredited and degenerate Vaishṇavas from one another. Some may affect particularities of dress more ragged or fantastic than others, and there are doubtless differences in tradition and custom between them. But as they are to be seem to-day at a village melā, the outward appearance is much the same. They all share pretty much the same essential doctrine, to justify their sensual mode of worship and to cover their loose living.

[1] *V.L.*, p. 235.

Sub-Sects

There are various groups of Vaishṇavas in Bengal which are not considered as belonging to the Chaitanya Vaishṇavas, but which claim some relation to the sect, or look upon Chaitanya as their founder, or show in their doctrine or practices the influence of the larger body. I shall consider briefly the more important of these groups.[1]

Karttābhajās.

This sect was founded by an ascetic named Aul Chand, a contemporary of Chaitanya, among low-caste people. It was greatly developed by a disciple, named Rām Charan Pāl, of Ghoshpāṛā, near Kāñchnāpāṛā, just out of Calcutta. By him and his followers, Aul Chand was identified with Chaitanya, indeed these two and Kṛishṇa were held to be one. The descendants of Rām Charan Pāl have continued in power ever since, some of those holding the supreme power having been women. The ruling Karttā, or Ṭhākur, as he is called, is supreme in authority and designates his successor. The gurus of the sect, called *mahāśay*, are under him and subject to him. They are assigned to different villages, one to each. They give mantras to disciples, first a partial one, then full after a period of proved devotion. The divinity of the guru is taught and his supreme rights over the bodies of disciples. All gifts and income from disciples are brought to the Karttā by the gurus once a year, at a grand festival held at Ghospāṛā. Many stories of miracles of healing performed at this time are circulated, and believed by the people. Caste lines are not observed. Some of the gurus are Moslems, and all followers eat together. The sect has had a considerable growth, but the adherents are mostly women. There is no literature of the sect to speak of. Songs are its characteristic expression, but they are not the work of cultured men. Aul Chand

[1] For some of the facts under this section I am indebted to the *Bhāratabarshīya Upāshak Sampradāya*, by Akshay Kumār Datta.

gave ten commandments on moral living to his followers, which form the moral basis of the sect's teaching. Truth-speaking is stressed, and abstention from liquor, meat, etc. The influence of the Chaitanya movement is evident in the emphasis on bhakti and prema (love) as the chief end of life. They have a few temples, but worship no idols. There are no mendicant members. The obligation to attend and give to the Ghospāṛā festival is prominent in the requirements. The census returns give no reliable data, as the adherents return themselves as Hindus and Moslems.

A curious chapter in the history of the Brahma Samāj is connected with the Karttābhajās. It appears that in the eighties of the last century, several members and even ministers of the Brahma Samāj were members of this sect, recognising the sect leaders as their gurus. They were led to this action, seemingly, by the desire for "a short cut" to the spiritual life. Paṇḍit Bijoy Kṛishṇa Gosvāmī, who had come out of the Chaitanya sect into the Brahma Samāj, was finally deposed from his position as minister in the Sādhāraṇ Samāj, on the grounds of "introducing a new system of religious discipline," reference being to the practices of the sect.[1]

There is practically nothing in common between this group and the followers of Gaurāṅga.

Bāuls.

The Bāuls are a group of Bengal Vaishṇavas whose name indicates their standing. The word means "mad." They lay claim to Chaitanya as their founder, but the sect was probably in existence before Chaitanya's day. Their origins are obscure. Their main doctrine, summed up in the term *dehatattva*, is the presence of God in the human body and the sufficiency of self-worship. All deities and sacred places exist in the body, and the way of worship is the cultivation of love for the deity within. This is best achieved through sex-love and the worship of woman. Female companions, therefore, are essential. The full realisation in

[1] *The World and The New Dispensation*, issue of July 19th, 1917.

A young Chaitanya vairāgi famed as a singer in Brindāban. Note the rosary bag in which the telling of the beads goes on.

A retired Asst.-Surgeon from Assam. Now a Chaitanya vairāgi at Brindāban.

A RURAL VAIRĀGĪ WITH HIS VAIRĀGIṆĪ
FROM THE DACCA DISTRICT.
He holds an *ektārā*.

A pair of mendicants at the Chaitanya birthday festival, at Navadvip. They appear to be Bāuls. Note the *gopīyantra* on the left and the *ektārā* on the right.

See p. 56.

sexual experience of the līlās of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa is exalted as the supreme worship. Naturally it is secret. Procreation is looked upon as evil, leading to rebirth. By means of a revolting drink, compounded of the excreta of the cow, they seek the so-called power of Kṛishṇa, *i.e.* sex-union without issue.

The sect is noteworthy for its rejection of image worship. The Gosvāmīs of the Chaitanyas are not recognised by the Bāuls, although they exalt their own gurus. The word of a guru takes precedence over the śāstras. Their ākhṛās are founded at the grave of a guru which they honour with worship. They are not strictly vegetarian, as are the Chaitanya Vaishṇavas, and they observe no fasts. They wear a long yellow robe known as *ālkhellā*, often mere rags patched together, use tilaks and necklaces made of glass, coral and seeds, and wear the hair and beard long, the hair often rolled up in crest shape on the head. *Daṇḍabat* is their form of salutation. They live in ākhṛās much as the Chaitanya vairāgīs do, but the better class do not beg promiscuously. Some practice yoga, and pride themselves on being superior to the Chaitanya vairāgīs. They have something of a literature in Bengali, but the technical terms of their *prakṛitī sādhana* (worship of the female principle) make the meaning of their songs difficult to understand. Popularly the sect is known as weird singers in ragged garb.

Not only their dress, but their musical instruments, their dancing and their songs are all characterised by a kind of queerness which makes them very amusing. The quaint allegories and rustic philosophy of their songs are highly appreciated by the lower classes. Their exhibitions are upon the whole so enjoyable that, in most of the important towns of Bengal, amateur parties of Bāuls have been organised, who cause great merriment on festive occasions by their mimicry.[1]

Darbesh.

The Vaishṇavas who go by this name are traditionally associated with the name of Sanātana Gosvāmī.

[1] *Hindu Castes and Sects*, p. 483. Bāuls are shown in the accompanying illustration.

It is said that when he fled from his high post in the Kingdom of Gaur to join Chaitanya, he assumed the guise of a Muhammadan faqir, and was followed in this by certain Vaishṇavas, who thus started a sect. Moslem influence is evident in their songs, which extol the divine names of Islam. Although an ascetic group, they are said to follow the Bāuls with respect to sensual modes of worship. They are similar also in dress and in their aversion to all use of images. Instead of wooden necklaces they use bead, coral and glass.

Shains.

The Shains are a branch of the Darbesh. They are more radical in their freedom from social rules and restrictions, observing no caste distinctions. They take wine and beef, for instance, and accept food from any and all.

Jaganmohinī Sect.

The Vaishṇavas of this group, numbering some five thousand, almost entirely of Sylhet, do not claim any connection whatever with the Chaitanyas, although they bear considerable similarity to them. Their name is that of the founder of the sect, whose tomb is marked by an ākhṛā near Habiganj, Sylhet. Originally this sect discarded idols and the tulsī plant, and inculcated a more spiritual form of worship, but the dead pull of custom, and pressure from Brindāban, resulted in a return to more orthodox Vaishṇava ways. The songs used in their worship are concerned with Hari, Kṛishṇa and Rāma, and include the praises of Chaitanya, but these songs are their own and not the usual Vaishṇava padas. They have a large and prosperous ākhṛā at Bithaṇgal, in Sylhet, which is reported to have an annual income of Rs. 40,000 from disciples' gifts. The inmates are all vairāgīs, and are credited with a stricter life than that of the Chaitanya vairāgīs.

CHAPTER X

THE CHAITANYA MOVEMENT IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

Our survey, however insufficient, of the Chaitanya Vaishṇavas, is finished. And yet it is not complete. There remains the necessity for an attempt, at least, to estimate the religious values of the sect, to set it in relation to other religious life and thought, that we may see it in a larger perspective and judge of it in the broader light of history. The Christian religion offers a natural point of departure. Even were it not the expressed purpose of the series in which this volume appears to set the religious life of India in relation to Christianity, this method would suggest itself as offering interest and illumination beyond the ordinary. For of all the manifestations of the Hindu religious consciousness, the Vaishṇava bhakti cults come nearest in thought and practice to the religion of Christ; and among them the Bengal school, because of the personal charm of its great leader and exemplar, its wealth of mystical experience, and its particular interpretation of the religion of love, offers many points of comparison to Christian thought and devotion.

Let it not be thought, however, that this study is actuated by a merely partisan desire to prove the superiority of one's own religion. Our desire is to find and set forth that religious truth by which men can best live their lives. All religions, without exception, must face the testing of human experience; slowly but surely they are being winnowed by the centuries. Only that which, in the long run, can best meet the insistent needs of humanity can hope to survive in the end. It is from such a point of view that we would pass in

review the features of these two religions which have so many points of kinship, that we may see as clearly as may be wherein lies the fuller and richer truth for the needs of men.

Ethical Standards

The first and most obvious thing that strikes one about the ethical standards of these two religions is, that they both derive their ideal and authority and power from the person of their founder. The combination of teaching and character, especially the exemplification of the teaching in the life and character, is that which has given vitality to the ethical ideas of both.

Ideas in Common.

The ethical ideas themselves have certain distinct elements in common. In fact, the determinative principle in both standards is very much the same. For Chaitanya, loving humility seems to have been the ideal of character most deserving of attainment. Humbleness of spirit he taught his followers with an efficacy that made it the distinguishing characteristic of the sect. The only writing ascribed to him, as we have seen, is a few Sanskrit ślokas, chiefly in praise of humility. The parallel here with the Beatitudes of Jesus, and with his constant emphasis upon humility of spirit needs no elaboration.

The ahiṁsā doctrine, although not original with the Vaishṇavas, became a leading characteristic of their ethics. It is a negative statement of the Christian doctrine of goodwill. The strict vegetarianism of the orthodox Vaishṇava is the logical result of this doctrine. This abstention from the taking of life in the animal world was also the law for the Vaishṇava's relation to his fellowmen, and here it took a form closely akin to Jesus' law of love. While never receiving so explicit and universal an expression as in the Sermon on the Mount, nevertheless the spirit of the true Vaishṇava was the spirit of love, deprecating the use of force and seeking to meet evil with the power of love.

Inseparable from this spirit was the disposition to forgiveness, which, both from Chaitanya's words and the example set by him and his disciples, has ever been cherished as distinctive of the Vaishṇava character. Here, again, this teaching is not set forth in what is ascribed to Chaitanya with the directness and unforgettable simplicity of Christ's injunctions to forgive. It is derived rather from the behaviour of Chaitanya and his disciples.

In these respects the Chaitanya ethical ideal comes very close to the heart of the Christian teaching. It is of the same spirit; it makes *premabhakti* (love's devotion) the supreme expression of life and religion; and in the practice of the ahiṁsā doctrine it has carried the principle of " live and let live " consistently into its relations with the animal world, in a way hardly known in the West.

Differing Ideas.

Over against these similarities we may point out two fundamental weaknesses that characterise the ethics of the Chaitanyas as compared with Christianity. They have to do, first, with its idea of the divine; and second, with its exemplification in the life of Chaitanya.

1. The ethical teaching of Jesus is grounded in his conception of God. It gains its power through its perfect expression and demonstration in his own life, but its ultimate authority as truth is found in the character of the righteous and fatherly God from whom he knew all his teaching to come. Given Jesus' idea of God as unchanging in His love, goodness and moral purpose, and no other ethical teaching is possible. It is not something added to his religious ideas and separable from them. The Christian ethic is of one piece throughout with the Christian doctrine of God.

We cannot feel that this is true in the same way of the ethics of Chaitanya. They do not seem to bear the same relation to his conception of the Supreme. They are not the inevitable issue of that conception. Their attractiveness and appeal are all the effect of the

personality of Chaitanya, but they lack the power and authority that can only come from their being grounded in the character and purpose of the divine.

This grounding of a consistent and powerful body of ethical ideas in the character and purpose of God is not to be found in Bengal Vaishṇavism. Its conception of the Supreme and the world order are in other terms, and its interests in religion do not furnish a stable basis for an ethical system. A passage from the *Charitāmṛita*, quoted in a previous chapter,[1] will throw light at this point. Replying to one of his disciples who had asked to suffer for the sin of humanity vicariously, Chaitanya said:

> You have prayed for the salvation of all beings in the world. Yes, they will find deliverance without undergoing punishment for their sins. Kṛishṇa is not powerless; he has all kinds of power . . . the whole world will be saved since you have wished it, for to Kṛishṇa it is no labour to redeem all.[2]

It is impossible to associate such a passage with the idea of God as ethically conceived. The great concepts of religion—deliverance, redemption, salvation—as used here are meaningless from a moral standpoint. They are simply emptied of ethical content. The same passage goes on as follows:

> Many figs grow on one fig tree, and a million universes float in the primal water. If one of the figs drops and perishes, the tree does not feel the loss. Similarly, if one universe is freed Kṛishṇa feels no loss in the least. Endless is the wealth of Kṛishṇa; including Vaikuṇṭha and other places, bounded by the causal water. In it float infinite universes under māyā, just like vessels full of mustard seeds in a moat. It means no loss if one of the seeds is lost; just so there is no loss to Kṛishṇa if one germinal universe is lost. Even if māyā herself is destroyed together with the universes, still Kṛishṇa himself will suffer no loss. A she-goat dies unheeded by the possessor of a million heavenly cows; so māyā does not affect Kṛishṇa, the master of the six supreme powers.[3]

In this strange passage we hear the echo of the ancient Hindu teaching of an Infinite, passionless, indifferent, actionless. In that pale infinity there is no basis for ethical ideas.

[1] p. 97. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xv, p. 292. [3] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xv, p. 292.

The fundamental conception of the world order characteristic of Bengal Vaishṇavism is, in brief, that it is the play or sport (līlā) of the Supreme, who is thought of as the All-Blissful (ānandam). He is ever engaged in the enjoyment of his own blissfulness. This universe is a manifestation of the eternal sportiveness, staging in the Brindāban Rādhā-Kṛishṇa episodes a dramatisation, as it were, of the All-Blissful in pursuit of his own sweetness. These sports go on eternally in the highest heaven, and constitute the very being and existence of the Supreme. Here again the very terms of this world-view suggest instability. A universe conceived only as the sport of the Supreme makes a rather uncertain footing for a healthy ethical system. There is a self-centredness about this conception and a lack of moral purpose, that make it difficult to find in it an all-sufficient ground of validity for the moral struggles and aspirations of humanity.

As a matter of fact, the verdict of history and of experience shows that the actual outcome and expression of this Vaishṇava conception, in literature and in life, has not been strongly marked ethically. At best it has been non-ethical, and the tendency has been constantly towards the unethical. The evidence for the non-ethical interest is best seen in the lyrics, the most characteristic outpouring of the bhakti of the Bengal school. For the most part, the moral note is lacking in these songs. They move in a realm quite unconcerned with all that we mean by ethical. We find this well expressed by a Bengali writer.

> These poems are very different from the ordinary productions of the religious imagination. There is nothing hortatory in them, no ethical note, as ethical is understood by our thought and culture. One does not find here even any picture of the ordinary struggles of the religious life, no note of the penitent sinner, no fight with sense and self, not even any persistent hankering after what is usually called the Infinite. They are simple pictures of the ordinary human emotions.[1]

[1] *Hindu Review*, March, 1914, p. 48.

This statement, from a philosophical study by a writer of no mean intelligence, is of particular interest.

The evidence for the unethical tendency is found in the history of the sect. In the hands of the truly devoted spirits such as have graced the sect in its best periods, the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa stories and the philosophy enshrining them have been used as aids to devotion. But in other hands the downward pull has become evident. In the long run the seeds of demoralisation have borne fruit in widespread deterioration.[1] The testimony of the sect's decline cannot be gainsaid. The low standard of life that characterises the Vaishṇavism of Bengal to-day is a sufficient commentary upon the ethical weakness of the sect's teaching. The mild words of the well-known scholar and student of Vaishṇavism, Sir Ramkṛishṇa Bhandarkar,[2] are weighty in this connection :

> The introduction of Rādhā's name, and her elevation to a higher position even than Kṛishṇa's, operated as a degrading element in Vaishṇavism, not only because she was a woman, but also because she was originally a mistress of the cowherd god, and her amorous dealings were of an overt character. . . . The Rāma cultus represents a saner and purer form of Hindu religious thought than Rādhā-Kṛishṇaism.

2. We have said that the appeal and attractiveness of the Chaitanya ethics were due to his personality. Indeed, his ethical teaching, although scanty, and the spirit of his life, stand above the body of his religious teaching. But in comparison with the Christian ethic there is a great weakness, in the fact that Chaitanya's ethical teaching never received the powerful confirmation and exaltation which the Christian ethic received in the death of Jesus. Chaitanya's witness to his own ethics was a diminishing one. As a moral influence his best days were the early days of the movement. The powers of a magnetic personality that

[1] Astonishing evidence of the moral laxity induced by the esoteric teaching of the sect is found in the life of Rāmānanda Rāy, one of its greatest ornaments. See *Ch.Ch.*, III, v, pp. 506-7.

[2] *V.S.*, p. 87.

might have done great service were used up in an emotionalism that left him an ineffective nervous wreck, the object of incessant care on the part of disciples. In comparison with this stands the Cross of Christ, for all time the consummation of his law of love, the transfigured symbol of a moral purpose carried to victory through sacrifice. It gains in moral grandeur with each succeeding century, equally the inspiration and the standard of mankind's moral advance.

Social Idealism

We need to recall here all that we pointed out in Chapter IV, as to the social influences of Chaitanya's religious movement. The main point is that it did a work of religious liberation that affected the social order. It created a new grouping of men, united by a common religious impulse, and in so doing it brought together men of various castes unaccustomed to such fellowship. The fervour of its religious feeling made possible a sort of democratic brotherhood, that for a time defied caste as well as the vested ecclesiastical interests. This was a notable thing in sixteenth century Bengal, and practically unparalleled in the history of other bhakti sects. Without any doubt the tremendous enthusiasm of the Chaitanya movement, which, in its early years, gave to it a contagious quality, was due largely to this sense of a new bond established among men long divided by social, religious and ecclesiastical usages. A striking feature of this new life, as we have pointed out, was the larger place given to woman, the recognition of her inherent capacities, and her right to function as an individual and not only as a female.

In all this there is a distant parallel to the flowering of a new brotherhood in the early Christian movement. In both cases it had its roots in a new and vivid experience of God, mediated by a commanding personality. In the direct effect of religious feeling upon human relationships, we have in both the social expression of religion. The artificial barriers men erect between

each other were burned away by the warmth of feeling produced in these movements, and men were made conscious of their essential oneness before God. In this primary experience the Chaitanya movement was truly akin to the Christian.

But in the character of the social ideal involved there is a world of difference. The Chaitanya movement had no real basis in its teaching on which to build a permanent brotherhood. It threw men into a democratic group, under the influence of an emotional stimulus, but such a social result is unstable. Further, its emotional stimulus, the practice of bhakti as Chaitanya taught it, is essentially an individual experience, not a social one. The one really democratic social agency the movement developed was the kīrtan, a group method of worship. The social appeal of the sect lay in this democracy of worship; the chanting of the lord's name was open to all and sufficient for all. Apart from this, however, there was no social ideal, no idea of a different or a better social order. Chaitanya's radicalism stopped with a casteless worship. Of a universal idea, a thought of all men and races in one brotherhood, there is no trace. Strictly speaking, we should say that the movement had no social idealism; it had only the social effects of a religious experience temporarily overflowing caste barriers. For, as we have just seen, there was lacking in the fundamental conceptions of the sect that which would produce a social hope.

The Christian social hope is implicit in its teaching about God and man. Jesus' vision of a new order of brotherly men was based entirely on his thought of God as the Father of all. Every man and woman in Jesus' eyes was a child of the common Father, all on the same footing, all equally precious to the Father's heart. Once this common relationship to God is recognised and accepted, men find themselves regarding all men as brothers and treating them as such. As the circle of such men widens there develops "a beloved community," a society of brotherly men in which there "cannot be Greek and Jew, barbarian, Scythian,

bondman, freeman."[1] This is the Kingdom of God, the rule of God in the hearts of men, the theme of all Jesus' teaching, the Cause for which he lived and died. It is a universal ideal, knowing no limits of race or place, and aiming at a revolution of the whole world's life. It is a social ideal far removed as yet from realisation, but it is a well-spring of faith and hope, feeding the flames of devotion and service in countless hearts the world around.

Of such a hope there is nothing in the Chaitanya sect. Its social belligerency continued for some generations, then waned. It has gone the way of all protestant movements in Hinduism. It had no inner power by which to break and dissolve the ancient order, and it succumbed. Its vision at its best was hardly more than provincial. A modern devotee may speak of "the principle of kīrtan as the future Church of the world,"[2] but the very phrase borrows the imagery and vision of a universal faith and hope totally foreign to the world of Chaitanya and his followers.

Theological Ideas

In the range of its theological ideas Bengal Vaishṇavism furnishes many striking points of similarity with Christian thought.

1. *The Doctrine of God.*

Bhakti requires for its object of devotion a personal God. It is an attitude of the soul toward the Supreme which necessitates a theistic faith. The two religions are at one in this regard. In spite of the inconsistent elements in the Vaishṇava theology which at times seem to confuse the issue, the religion of Chaitanya was passionately concerned with a personal Spirit, conceived of as all love, whom to adore was the joy of life. For Chaitanya, Kṛishṇa was this being.

For Vaishṇava and Christian alike, grace, prasāda, is a great word. In the thought of both there is the conception of a great good bestowed upon the individual,

[1] Paul's letter to the Colossians, iii, 11. [2] *C.M.L.P.*, p. 60.

free and unmerited. It is not bought by ceremonial or ritual or sacrifice; it is the gift of a gracious Giver, bestowed out of love and mercy.

In conceiving of the divine nature as love, and of the relation between divine and human as being fulfilled in love, the two religions share the noblest conception of humanity. Jesus' enunciation of the first great law of life as the loving of God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength could have been heartily echoed by Chaitanya.

Certain very definite qualifications, however, are necessary to this statement of likeness in the idea of God. There is very real kinship of thought, but there is also vital difference. From the Christian viewpoint there is, in the Vaishṇava conception, a lack of depth and consistency. The deeps of goodness, purpose and will in the divine nature are not sounded in Chaitanya's teaching of God. The love and līlā concepts are to the Christian mind extraordinarily difficult to combine. The element of chance, lightness, frivolity, and inconsequence that appear inseparable from the līlā idea, is not compatible with the vision of God as eternal love. The ethical weakness of that idea is revealed still more vividly when it is associated with the doctrine of God's love. For that which is the very nature and crown of true love is lacking, namely, that self-emptying, self-giving, redemptive spirit, which, at whatever cost to itself, goes out to seek and to save the lost. There is no cross in Vaishṇavism nor any conception of suffering in the heart of God. Furthermore, the great word love itself, as applied to God, does not mean what it does to the Christian. *Prema* is a beautiful word in the Indian languages. It is the great word for love, quite the opposite of *kāma*, which denotes sensual desire. But time and again the reader is made to feel that the Vaishṇava scriptures use the word in senses bordering on the erotic, thus demeaning it from its noble estate.[1] Far

[1] Cf., for instance, *C.P.T.*, 2nd Ed., p. 64, where the figure of Cupid is used by the translator as most fitting to set forth the idea of Kṛishṇa's incarnation of love at Brindāban.

above this is the meaning of St. John's word, "God is love." Finally, the note of holiness is lacking in the Vaishṇava conception. There is no hungering or thirsting after that which can be satisfied only by a God whose nature is the beauty of holiness and whose will eternal righteousness.

2. *The Doctrine of Salvation.*

In its ideas of salvation, Bengal Vaishṇavism comes particularly near to Christian truth. As we have seen, Kṛishṇa is conceived of as bestowing his gifts on the devotee. Thus salvation comes. It is a gracious gift of love, not won by merit or deeds of any sort, or by sacrifice. The sole requisite is faith in Kṛishṇa, which generates bhakti in the heart, and this in turn bears fruit in passionate love for the Lord. Salvation is the result. The striking thing in Chaitanya's teaching is that the whole ecclesiastical structure of ceremonial, sacrifice, ritual and priest falls away, and the soul of the devotee, brought into direct relation to its lord, finds salvation in loving devotion alone. It is interesting to remember that, while Chaitanya was preaching this bhakti to a priest-ridden Bengal, Martin Luther was defying the ecclesiasticism of Rome, and asserting the primitive Christian teaching that the believer is saved through faith in Christ.

The idea of what actually constitutes the state of salvation is much the same in both teachings. It is a dedicated life, an attitude of devotion and an experience of love which irradiates the whole life. The essence of salvation to the Vaishṇava is just the experience of bhakti; therefore his idea of salvation may be said to be progressive, because bhakti is a progressive experience. It is also true to say that, because of this, salvation is conceived as both a present and a future state, being more akin to Christian ideas in this than to traditional Hindu thought, which finds it difficult to think of salvation as anything but release from the terms and conditions of this bodily life. It is interesting to note the importance assigned to the fellowship of faithful Vaishṇavas

in the process of salvation. It is the influence of true bhaktas that spreads the contagion of faith among men fettered by the world's bonds.[1] This is also a true Christian note. The ultimate agency in salvation is recognised as the attraction of the lord, who fascinates men.[2] This is the equivalent of the Christian doctrine of the work of the Spirit, but it is undeveloped. Indeed, there is no parallel in the Vaishṇava scriptures to the work of the Spirit in the Christian religion.

In its conception of that from which the soul is saved, Vaishṇavism falls back upon traditional ideas which are strange to Christian thought. It is illusion, māyā, ignorance—the realm subject to the working of karma and transmigration. True bhakti liberates the soul from the fetters of this slavery, and brings it into the realisation and ever-growing enjoyment of the divine love, which is salvation. The Christian apostle, Peter, looking back upon the great experience of his life, writes of being "called out of darkness into His (God's) marvellous light."[3] So the *Charitāmṛita* speaks repeatedly of the release from the bondage of the world into the joyous experience of love and devotion to Kṛishṇa. The religious experience involved here is of the same order.

3. *The Doctrine of Heaven and the Future.*

The theologians of the Chaitanya sect display a great antipathy to the Vedāntic conception of mukti (emancipation) as absorption in the Infinite. They vigorously reject the time-honoured term mukti itself, because of its association with the Vedāntic idea. Their hatred of this school of thought is due to its tendency to conceive of the individual consciousness as being swallowed up in the All. Bhakti depends for its very life on continuing personal relations. Thus bhakti is upheld by the Vaishṇavas as a much more satisfying conception of salvation than mukti.

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxiv, p. 423. [2] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxiv, p. 415.
[3] I Peter ii, 9.

This thought gives to their idea of heaven a basis identical with the Christian conception. Unending love and service of Kṛishṇa is the Vaishṇava hope. "Forever with the Lord" could be sung equally well by the Vaishṇava bhakta as by the Christian disciple, to express the thought of the future life.

The Vaishṇava contends that eternal bhakti is a far higher conception than mukti, since the latter represents an end or goal selfishly sought for, while bhakti asks only the joy of forever going on in the loving service of its Lord. This vision of the soul's unending devotion is a true and lofty conception. Surely Christian devotion can recognise and acknowledge here the language of its own thought of the future life.

When we recall, however, that the only discoverable idea concerning the nature of heaven is that it is the Brindāban love-sports eternally, we cannot help feeling that the heavenly reach of bhakti is far nobler than its grasp. To Christian thought there is a spiritual barrenness insupportable in the Vaishṇava eschatology. Of the satisfaction of the highest and most sacred aspirations of the human spirit after likeness with God, of St. Paul's great vision of growing up in all things into Christ, of Tennyson's "full-grown energies of heaven" with all that this idea signifies, of the great hope of the communion of the saints, and the glorious imagery of the Kingdom of Heaven, into which shall enter nothing unclean, but which shall receive the glory and honour of the nations—of these and kindred hopes of the Christian soul the Vaishṇava ideal has no word.

4. *The Doctrine of Incarnation.*

In its doctrine of incarnation Vaishṇavism is, of course, on common ground with Christian thought. We should keep in mind, however, that we are not dealing here with identical terms. The Hindu avatāra is not the exact equivalent of incarnation. It means a descent of the divine, a simpler idea than the Christian, and involves the assumption by the divine of various forms and disguises, appearing on and disappearing from the

plane of human and even animal existence. The Christian term runs deeper, meaning the entrance of the divine into human life, and expressing its very self in and through human consciousness. In spite of this difference, we can speak of an incarnation doctrine in common, for the intensity with which the Bengal school centres all its theology and religion in Kṛishṇa as the manifestation of the Supreme makes a comparison with Christian thought natural.

The differences appear at once, for in the Chaitanya sect the incarnation idea is not a clear and simple principle of thought. It becomes diffused and watered down, as it were, until it loses all likeness to the Christian conception. Vaishṇava thought, for example, knows no limit to the number of incarnations there may be. Even with its emphasis upon the significance of Kṛishṇa, he is not counted as final or sufficient. He is to be followed by at least one more, just as he was preceded by many. But a series of incarnations indicates a continuing need unmet. Thus it does not appear that Kṛishṇa is conceived of as completely and fully revealing the Supreme, or as being the agent and mediator of a redemptive power sufficient for humanity's need. Christian thought, on the other hand, sees and worships in Christ the complete and sufficient revelation of the Father God opening up for all time a "new and living way" for men into fellowship with Him. It believes that in this life of Christ is seen a new beginning for the race, that in him a new spiritual factor was brought into play in human life, a permanent enrichment and revitalising of humanity was accomplished, and that henceforth men need but to rise into full realisation of their new life and power in Christ to achieve the final triumph of the Kingdom of God. Thus the values sought in the Vaishṇava doctrine of repeated avatāras are fully conserved and transcended in the Christian faith.

The diffusion of the incarnation idea goes on in the Chaitanya sect until it loses its essential meaning. Thus we find full incarnations, half and even quarter

incarnations, if not lesser fractional representations of the divine. Among the Chaitanyas, for example, the two leading companions of Chaitanya, Nityānanda and Advaita, are reverenced as partial incarnations. This practice of honouring gurus and saints by conferring the title of incarnation upon them, indicates that the use of the term avatāra actually represents, often, little more than religious hero worship.

A third essential difference in the two conceptions lies in the utter lack of historical basis in the Vaishṇava doctrine. It is to be remembered that the Kṛishṇa who is the avatāra of the Chaitanyas' devotion is the product of pastoral folklore. He is the hero of the cowherds, the Purāṇic figure of myth and legend. But the fact that he is utterly mythical makes no difference to the devotee; in fact, the distinction does not exist for him, since an uncritical acceptance of mythology as history still characterises much of popular Hinduism. To Christian thought an unhistorical incarnation is a contradiction in terms, a nonentity. Furthermore, the lack of an historical norm and standard, an ideal of life and character realised in human terms, by which the whole development of religion is tested and guided, seems a very serious defect of such a conception. It puts religious devotion at the mercy of imagination. "And imagination may be degraded as well as exalted. From imagination has come not only the noble conception of the Kṛishṇa of the Gītā, but the debasing conception of the Kṛishṇa of the Purāṇas."[1] It also makes possible that strangest of all anomalies in religion, an incarnation whose life among men is in opposition to their moral ideas, who is to be worshipped as God but not imitated as a man. Thus a well-known author, writing in praise of the Brindāban stories as allegory, speaks of Kṛishṇa as "the great seducer," and says, "The relation of the milkmaids with the divine herdsman is not in any sense a model intended to be realised in human relationships, and the literature

[1] Cave *Redemption, Hindu and Christian*, p. 221.

contains explicit warnings against any such confusion of planes."[1]

One final weakness may be pointed out from the Christian point of view, the corollary of the first one noted. Just as a series of incarnations indicates insufficiency in any one, from the standpoint of divine revelation, so also, when coupled with the utter lack of interest in their historicity, this belief seems to point to ultimate pessimism as to the capacity of humanity to receive a full and saving revelation of God. A view of humanity that requires an avatāra every succeeding age to rescue it and enable it to "carry on," seems based on fundamental doubt of the nobility of human nature and its capacity to receive and maintain the divine life. This to the Christian is the negation of that which makes the incarnation doctrine a glorious and transforming belief; for he sees in it the crowning proof of humanity's oneness with the divine, and the promise, therefore, of its ultimate redemption.

5. *The Doctrine of Sin.*

The emphasis upon love as the supreme realisation of the religious life in both systems would naturally make lovelessness the essence of sin in each. This is not so evident in Vaishṇavism as in the teachings of Jesus. It is true that in general that which hinders Kṛishṇabhakti is considered sinful, but there is no clear teaching about sin. There is little emphasis on the idea of sin, either as moral evil or as spiritual estrangement from the love of God or from one's fellows. In fact, sin is differently understood by the Vaishṇava. It is described as due to ignorance (avidyā), or illusion (māyā). The soul is spoken of as caught in the meshes or bonds of illusion, in bondage to the world, fettered, subject to re-birth. It does not appear to be a state of wilful rebellion against the will of God, or a frustration of that filial attitude of love and trust which

[1] Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Śiva*, p. 104. This statement is based on *Ch.Ch.*, I, iv, p. 43, and similar passages.

is the soul's true harmony and peace. To the Christian, it is just this dereliction, this conscious estrangement from the love of God, which makes the sense of sin. The difference between the two is felt more clearly perhaps than can be expressed. Perhaps an essential thing is the lack in the Vaishṇava conception of a clear note of responsibility, which alone can produce the sense of guilt. "From illusion (māyā) comes the sin of turning the face away from Kṛishṇa," we are told.[1]

It is this feeling of guilt, which, in so much of Christian literature, has produced the sense of sin as an intolerable burden on the soul, a feeling which has given to the experience of forgiveness its tremendous power. It is a significant commentary upon the Vaishṇava teaching about sin that this experience of forgiveness hardly appears at all. Furthermore, we miss the larger aspects of moral evil that transcend the individual life. The terrible power of evil, as expressed in and through society, its sinister persistence in the form of heredity, the suffering it brings to the innocent and the unborn, its cohesiveness, its putrescent contagion, its malignant capacity to thwart the progress of human welfare—all that has been envisaged in Christian thought, both theologically and practically, as the problem of moral evil—of this there is nothing in the Vaishṇava scriptures. The difference runs straight back to the fundamental lack of ethical character and purpose, which we perceived as characterising the fountain source of Vaishṇava theology.

This is made more clear by a reference to the ideas about the remedy for sin. The means for cleansing the soul of sin are often purely external and mechanical, such as that one utterance of Kṛishṇa's name removes all sin, or that the sight and washing of an image of Kṛishṇa saves men. The assertion put into Chaitanya's mouth, that "it is no labour to Kṛishṇa to deliver all men. At your mere wishing the universe will be

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, xxiv, p. 424.

redeemed," is the language of a realm of thought utterly divorced from the reality of human sinfulness as a spiritual and ethical fact. A curious illustration of a material conception is found in a modern work of the sect, where the description is given of a transaction by which Chaitanya received the load of sin accumulated by the ruffians, Jagāi and Mādhāi. "No sooner had the lord said, 'I accept,' than his golden hue was changed and his complexion became dark. . . . The change of colour in the lord shewed that the sins of the brothers had entered his body."[1]

Theory and Practice of the Religious Life

As we have seen, the theory and practice of religion for the Bengal Vaishṇava is summed up in bhakti. We propose now, as briefly as may be, to consider bhakti and Christian devotion from the viewpoint of religious experience.

1. *The Experience of God.*

We may note at the very outset a fundamental characteristic of real religion possessed by both. That is the note of joy. This is due to the fact that both of these religions opened to common folk a direct access to God. Chaitanya bhakti brought to the people of Bengal the immense refreshment of a personal experience of religion, in place of the blind forms of animistic worship or the brutalizing influence of the prevalent cults. It broke through priestcraft and convention, and tapped the springs of feeling that always flow when the soul is brought into direct relation with God. So it has ever been with Christian devotion. Its beginning was in the experience of the abundant new life Christ gave to men by bringing them into living communion with God their Father, and the Church's great times of renewal have always been through rediscovery of, and return to, this primal spring of power. Now the

[1] *Gaurāṅga*, Vol. I, p. 260. This incident is found in *Ch.Bh.*, II, xiii, p. 157.

inevitable outcome of this fundamental experience of God is joy, and joy naturally expresses itself in song. It is no accident that Christianity has come by its great hymnology, unequalled in any other religion, or that the Vaishṇavism of Bengal possesses in its lyrics a unique body of song.

2. *The Imagery of Devotion.*

One of the most familiar features of the bhakti of the Chaitanyas is its division into the five stages already described. Although not original in the sect, this five-fold aspect of bhakti has become associated with the name of Chaitanya. It is really a classification of religious experience on a progressive scale according to the particular genius of the Chaitanyas. These five stages represent different grades of religious feeling expressed in terms of various human relationships. A very similar differentiation in Christian religious experience is easily discernible in its devotional literature, both in the New Testament and in Christian history. The language of Christian devotion, just as with the Vaishṇavas, has always availed itself of the rich imagery of human relationships in all its phases.

The first stage of Chaitanya bhakti, the *śānta*, is that marked by quiet and peace, the resting of the mind upon the beloved object in utter calm and trust. Its counterpart in Christian devotion is the quietistic type familiar in all periods of Christian history. In the New Testament the figure of Mary, sister of Martha, at the feet of Jesus is a beautiful example of this type of experience.[1] The second, or *dāsya* stage, characterised by the feelings of slave or servant, is richly paralleled in Christian phraseology. Paul, the bond-slave of Christ, heads an unbroken line of devout spirits who have expressed the utter devotion of their hearts in terms of slavery and servitude. Jesus himself, washing his disciples' feet in graphic emphasis of his words, "I am among you as he that serveth,"[2] has set

[1] Luke, x, 38-42. [2] Luke, xxii, 27.

the seal of his own spirit upon this aspect of devotion. Indeed, in Christian devotion, as our previous discussion will have made clear, this stage is fundamental, instead of being initiatory as in Vaishṇava thought. Its imagery is more fully amplified in Christian devotion. For example, the whole imagery of warfare has been widely used in the latter, and does not appear in the Vaishṇava bhakti at all. It may be claimed, indeed, that this is really an unchristian element introduced into Christian thought, and it cannot be denied that it has been over-emphasized and has given rise to a militancy of spirit that is far from the spirit of Jesus. Granting this, the fact still remains that at root it springs from the dāsya idea, and expresses the devotion of the spirit that feels itself under the command of its Lord, ready for service to the death against the powers of evil that withstand his sway.

The *sakhya* stage, conceiving of devotion in terms of friendship, is common to both faiths. In Christian devotion it finds its fountain source in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, expressed in his own beautiful words, "No longer do I call you servants; . . . but I have called you friends."[1] The *bātsalya*, or fourth stage in the Vaishṇava scheme, expressing devotion in terms of the parent and child relation, is, of course, quite fundamental to Christian experience. The very heart of the Christian faith is that God is the eternal Father and all are his children. The Kingdom of God, for which Jesus gave himself, is essentially just the family ideal carried into universal terms—the Father God and his family. The filial attitude and devotion is thus the very essence of Christian devotion, and to the Christian this attitude is determinative of all phases and grades of devotion. To the Vaishṇava, however, this form of devotion is not interpreted in the full light of the filial relationship. It is concerned only with the parental feeling toward the child. It is really a subsidiary form of devotion, expressed in the worship of the Bāla

[1] John's Gospel, xv, 15.

Gopāla, the child Kṛishṇa. Indeed, it hardly seems to belong in the place next to the highest; for in the actual Vaishṇava experience the sakhya stage is next to the highest, and receives far more emphasis than the bātsalya. An almost exact parallel in Christian devotion is the New Testament picture of the Wise Men and the Christ Child, and the worship of the Bambino as it obtains in the Roman Catholic Church. This phase of devotion is a very minor one in the Roman Church, and is practically unknown elsewhere in the Christian Church.

The highest form of devotion, according to the Chaitanyas, is the *mādhurya*, the passionate adoration that finds expression in the imagery of the most intimate of human relationships. In Christian devotion this finds a limited parallel only, and that largely confined to the mystical practices of mediæval monasticism. The Roman Catholic nun was, and still is, taught to think of her soul as the bride of Christ, but it is only simple fact to say that this has never been a general expression of Christian devotion. In Protestant teaching it is the Church which is the bride of Christ, a very different conception. This point will receive fuller treatment in the discussion of mysticism which follows.

3. *Mysticism and Saintliness.*

We come now to the consideration of the mysticism of these two forms of devotion, a subject of very great interest. It will be clear at once that they have much in common in the prominence given to the mystical experience. Indeed, the bhakti of the Bengal Vaishṇavas, as Chaitanya himself developed it, is very largely mystical in its nature and processes. Its surpassing interest is in feeling, and mystical states, such as trance and ecstasy, become for it the goal of religious endeavour. Then again its division of bhakti into vaidhi and rāgānuga,[1] and the great emphasis put upon the latter, created an esoteric principle, which is wholly mystical. The gopī doctrine, which is thus held to be the very

[1] See above p. 110 ff.

essence of bhakti—its royal doctrine (rājātattva)—without following which no one can come into the full experience of bhakti, teaches a purely mystical method of devotion.

(*a*) As all mystical feeling is of the same sort wherever found, we should expect to find general similarities between the Vaishṇava and the Christian. Their kinship, however, is closer than a general similarity. Miss Underhill's familiar classification of the symbolism of mystic thinkers divides them into three classes: (1) those who conceive of Reality as a place and express their search in terms of a quest; (2) those who conceive of it as a Person and think in terms of personal desire and relationships; (3) those who conceive of it as a state and long for inward change.[1] In Christian mysticism all three types are found, but the second group, conceiving Reality as personal, claims the greatest number. For them Christ is the object of devotion, and personal imagery is the natural symbol for the expression of their thought. Now the bhakti of the Bengal Vaishṇavas manifestly belongs to this same group. Kṛishṇa is its personal object of faith, loving devotion the relationship, and the language of human passion its natural expression. It is not strange, therefore, that the mysticism of the two should have certain features in common.

For example, we find a striking mystical experience, characteristic of many of the chief Christian mystics, closely paralleled in the Vaishṇava literature. We saw in Chapter VI that the Vaishṇava padas, *par excellence* the mystical literature of the sect, are generally classified according to the stage of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa love-play with which they deal, six different stages being distinguished from the dawn of love until its spiritualisation. It is the māthur stage, concerned with the agony of separation from Kṛishṇa, that comes very near to a common experience of the Christian mystics. Among the latter this is called "the dark or obscure

[1] *Mysticism*, p. 151 ff.

night of the soul," or "the great dereliction," as St. Teresa spoke of it, or the "mystic death" of Madame Guyon. It refers to a temporary loss of vision of God, a sense of spiritual dryness or estrangement from him in whom the soul delights. The groaning of spirit among the Christian mystics in this state is voiced in language that is often almost identical with that of the Chaitanya mystics. Not only is it true of the language, but of the physical concomitants as well. Compare the following accounts, for example:[1]

> Years after she had attained this fourth stage, Teresa experienced what the mystics call "the great dereliction," a sense of ineffable loneliness and desolation, which nevertheless is the path to incomparable happiness. It was accompanied by a kind of catalepsy, with muscular rigidity and cessation of the pulses.[2]

> From that day the Master's ecstatic state increased, and his sense of separation from Kṛishṇa redoubled. Day and night he raved deliriously. . . . Then Gaurāṅga began to cry, in extreme sorrow, "O Kṛishṇa, where have you gone?" . . . In this way half the night was spent lamenting . . . without sleeping he sat up and sang the name. From his sense of separation an impetuous longing seized him, and he began to rub his face (on the ground) in the room. His face, cheek and nose were fearfully lacerated, and in his ecstasy he was unconscious of the blood flowing down. . . . And Svarūp heard him groaning.[3]

Similarly, as regards the stage which follows the māthur—the Bhāva-Sanmīlana, or the union in spirit, in which the realisation of spiritual oneness is expressed. This corresponds roughly to the unitive life, the last of the three general stages commonly recognised in Christian mysticism.

(*b*) The illustrations just given suggest at once a correspondence in the physical manifestations that have accompanied mystical experience, both Vaishṇava and Christian. No other bhakti sect in India offers such fertile ground for comparison in this respect as do the Chaitanyas. Particularly in Chaitanya's own experience, the extremes of emotionalism provide the student with

[1] For the elaboration of this point, see *C.C.*, pp. 174 ff., where Dr. Sen dwells on this comparison at some length.

[2] Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 221.

[3] *Ch.Ch.*, III, xix, pp. 591-94.

a striking array of phenomena. That they can all be duplicated in the history of the Christian Church at some period or other is hardly an overstatement. The trance and various ecstatic states have accompanied the Christian mystical experience in many periods of its history, although never recognised as absolutely essential to that experience. The mediæval outlook and environment are necessary to these psychic phenomena, however. They have not thriven in enlightened circumstances.

For a vivid parallel to the extremes of Chaitanya's emotionalism we only need to look to the records of revivalism in the West. In the early days of American frontier life great revivals of religious feeling swept over the country periodically, bringing with them, usually, great excitement and certain peculiar emotional characteristics. The appeal of these religious epidemics was to the feelings, the atmosphere created was highly overwrought, and the method and cause of their spread was largely group contagion and suggestion. Similar phenomena accompanied the Wesleyan Revival in England in the eighteenth century, and can be traced at various periods of Christian history. St. Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth gives us vivid glimpses of the "gift of tongues," a phase of emotional excitement that marked the early Church of his day.

The undoubted similarity between these extreme characteristics of Vaishnava and Christian devotion is seen to be inevitable in the light of modern psychology. The study of religious experience and its psychology during the past decade or two, has placed at our disposal an immense amount of material gathered from all religions. From it we see with the utmost clearness that emotionalism in religion, carried to extremes, produces similiar phenomena in all ages and among all religions. The psychologists tell us that these phenomena are phases of hysteria induced by various forms of suggestion, and resulting in trances, fits, seizures, ecstatic dancing, various physical excesses, such as contortion, jumping, rolling, running, shrieking, and what

not.[1] The type of mind tending to such experiences is clearly discernible, marked by nervous instability and a high state of suggestibility. The survey of Chaitanya's life as a study in religious experience, must convince anyone familiar with the methods and results just referred to that he was a remarkably clear example of this type of mind. Given an emotional temperament of great power, linked with a highly-strung nervous organisation, and we have the proper endowment. Devote this sensitive and high-powered organism to unceasing emotional exercises, and expose it constantly to the influence of a powerful excitant like the kīrtan, with its musical stimulus, its physical stimulus in the dance, and its immense capacity for group suggestion, and the result is seen in growing instability and an ever-increasing susceptibility to suggestion. This is perfectly clear from the record. He could be stirred to ecstasy by the merest suggestion; anything having the slightest connection with his "emotional complex" centring in Kṛishṇa could serve: such as image, song, the dark-blue colour of his beloved. The blue sky, a blue flower, the blue of the waves, even a tree trunk, could send Chaitanya into a trance. His nervous organism became like a hair-trigger gun, that needs only a touch to send it off.

(*c*) This leads us naturally to a consideration of the question that is involved in this discussion, namely, the estimation of the value of these accompaniments of mystical feeling, and their bearing on the saintly ideal, both Vaishṇava and Christian. It must be remembered that the psychological explanation of how psychic phenomena are produced does not necessarily prove them wrong or worthless. It simply removes them out of the realm of the miraculous, and strips them of the

[1] "The sacred frenzy of the Bacchantes, the trance of the Sibyls, the ecstasy of the neo-Platonists, the enlightenment that came to Gautama Buddha under the sacred bo-tree, the visions of canonised saints, the absorption into God experienced by various mystics and the religious epidemic of the Middle Ages—all these and a multitude of similar phenomena were produced by processes easily recognised by any modern psychologist as automatic and suggestive" (Coe, *The Spiritual Life*, p. 141).

marvellous and mysterious. It means that we now know how they are produced and what causes them. The question of their worth or value in religious experience is another matter, upon which science does not have the last word.

It is in the estimation of the worth of these phenomena that Vaishṇava and Christian thinkers differ very widely. To the Vaishṇava they are of supreme worth; for often they are for him the very vestibule of heaven, the climax and consummation of his longing for the divine. As Dr. Sen says: "The vision is a truth . . . when it comes it is a strange experience of joy to the soul; it sanctifies even those who behold the mystic trance."[1] It is in the trance that bliss is found, and the very loss of consciousness is to the devotee the indubitable evidence of union with God. So to this day in India, in the eyes of most people, the samādhi state is the highest mark of the spiritual attainment of a saint. There can be no doubt of Chaitanya's valuation of the various ecstatic states of his bhakti experience, even the wildest of them; toward the end of the record he laments continually when his alarmed disciples bring him out of his trances. The same is true of the later saints of the sect. In the whole of the literature we find no other attitude but that of full acceptance of all these phenomena as evidence of, as well as the accompaniment of, spiritual attainment. There is no evidence of restraint, no fear of excess, no self-criticism, no rational or ethical test.

Among Christian mystics, even of the Middle Ages when similar phenomena were most common, we are struck by the evidence of discrimination and self-criticism in the lives of the best. They are fearful of too much vision and its concomitants. St. Teresa was constantly warning her disciples against them, for some of them are from the devil. They are to be rigidly tested by their contribution to the spirit's illumination. Another scorns the "monkey tricks of the soul." St. John of the Cross,

[1] *V.L.*, p. 185.

one of the strictest ascetics of his day, was doubtful of some of these things.[1] And so on, the list could be extended. "The spiritual guides of the Middle Ages were well aware that such experiences often come of disordered nerves and weakened digestion."[2] This attitude has its classic expression in the very beginning of Christian history, in St. Paul's dealing with the emotional excesses of the Church at Corinth. In his epistles to that newly-established congregation, he lays down the fundamental principle that all these things are to be tested by their usefulness to the brotherhood, by their power to edify.[3] In a letter to the Galatian Christians, he sets forth the ethical test of religion in unforgettable words: "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such there is no law."[4] This is the Christian principle for the testing of all manifestations of religious experience, of whatever sort: do they minister to the building up of the "beloved community"? do they issue in noble character? This fundamental insistence, which comes from Jesus Christ, that religious experience should work itself out in character and life, has tended steadily to discountenance the mediæval phenomena of mysticism in Christianity. The experience of God that can only be had in a trance seems of little value to mankind, however it appears to the mystic. Hand in hand with this ethical demand has gone the enlightenment of modern knowledge. As Christian men have learned the workings of their own minds, they have come to discount hysteria as a sign of spirituality. Extremes of emotion, lack of mental control, pathological states of mind or body, are felt to be signs of spiritual weakness rather than strength. The character of Jesus makes all these things seem unbalanced and less than the ideal. That ideal is wholeness and fullness of life, in which poise and sanity are works of the Spirit as well

[1] Herman, *Meaning and Value of Mysticism*, pp. 51-52. Underhill, op. cit., p. 329 ff.

[2] Inge, op. cit., p. 17. [3] I Cor., xiv. [4] Gal., v, 22.

as devotion. Thus it is that in modern times, perhaps the finest fruit of Christian mysticism is to be found in the Quaker sect, the Society of Friends. Thoroughly mystical in its nature, their religious experience has outgrown all emotional excess, and learned to express itself in steadfast character and noble service.

(*d*) The difference in the saintly ideal of Vaishṇava and Christian may be fairly and more concretely shown by contrasting Chaitanya with two representative mystics of the Middle Ages, St. Bernard and St. Francis of Assisi, both of them noble figures in Christian history. These men have much in common with the Bengal saint. They were the greatest monks of their period, true ascetics as was Chaitanya, and of tremendous influence on their own and succeeding generations. Neither of them "was pre-eminently an intellectual force,"[1] as Chaitanya was not. These three stand upon the same plane, their influence arising out of their magnetic characters, the peculiar quality and power of their religious devotion, and the manifest way in which the grace of God was revealed in and through them. They were all men of great and consuming love, in thought, spirit and life. They conceived of God as love; this was the theme of themes to them all and the inspiration of their passionate devotion. Bernard's glowing sermons on the Song of Songs are the nearest approach in Christian preaching to the passionate imagery and language of the Vaishṇava literature. As we read the lives of these three saintly men, so much alike in spirit, we cannot fail to note one great difference. In comparison with Bernard and Francis, Chaitanya's life, from the Purī period on, seems strangely empty. For him the demands of bhakti served to fill his time and satisfy his spirit. He lived for its ecstasies and trances. It consumed all his energies; and, as his life wore on, one feels that it weakened what contacts he had with humanity. Indeed, the records clearly indicate a

[1] Taylor, *Mediæval Mind*, Vol. I, p. 415.

shrinking from any intrusion of the needs of men upon his thought. The Christian saints, on the other hand, although strongly drawn to a life of contemplation and not unacquainted in their own experience with the ecstatic joys of mystic communion, were driven to a life of toil and service by the warmth of their love. The inner life of the spirit in them was as a fountain welling up in a constant stream of spiritual succour for the needs of men about them.

(*e*) We may now summarise what seem to be the defects of the Chaitanya bhakti as a religious experience. We may state it generally by saying that it is not a full and rounded type of religion, because it does not encompass or satisfy the whole personality of man. "A spiritual religion of the full and complete type," we are told by a life-long student of mystical religion,[1] "will have inward mystical depth, it will be vitalised and intensified with its experiences of divine supplies, and of union and unification with an environing Spirit, but it must at the same time soundly supplement its more or less capricious and subjective, and always fragmentary, mystical insights with the steady and unwavering testimony of Reason, and no less with the immense objective illumination of history." It is because the bhakti experience of the Chaitanyas, in common with so much of mysticism, fails to realise this standard, that we feel it to be lacking in essential elements of true religion.

The first charge is that of intellectual feebleness. As seen in Chaitanya's life, bhakti resulted in steady deterioration of his intellectual endowment. The reason practically ceased to function under the increasing sway of the emotions. His religious experience made little or no demand upon his intellect, and there were no other interests to feed upon. There was no study, no production, and the only reading he did was confined to a very small circle of books, in which the devotional element was supreme. Nothing

[1] R. M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Introduction xxix.

else was desired. Indeed, in the records, reason is disparaged in no uncertain terms as opposed to the interests of faith and bhakti.[1] Chaitanya's religious experience thus did despite to his own personality, and consequently lacked the intellectual virility without which religion degenerates.

The second charge must be its social defect. Bhakti shares with all mysticism this fatal weakness. Feeling is a subjective thing, and its ecstasies are necessarily incommunicable. Bhakti is by its very nature self-centred, it lives in and for its own emotions. Its aspiration after union with the Ineffable is often as though the self and God were alone in the universe. Dr. Grierson puts it thus: "Its essence is almost selfish, a soul-absorbing, nay, all-absorbing, individual love, cast at the feet of him who is love itself. It teaches that first and great commandment of the Christian law, but the second, which is like unto it—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself—it omits."[2] It is the great ideal of the Kingdom of God that saves Christian devotion from this subjective defect. Devotion to Christ is for the sake of the brotherhood, and can never escape this social test.

This social defect is also an ethical weakness, and therefore the third charge against bhakti is a moral one. Its very emotion, which is its all, loses its virility, because marooned and unrelated. Emotion in itself is not weakness; it is the power of all rich personality, but it is so only when truly co-ordinated with mind and will. The emotion of Chaitanya's bhakti tended to dissipation, because unrelated to life and reality. It generates an enormous amount of steam, but drives nothing. Involved in its subjective experiences, such emotion becomes morbid and loses its healthiness.[3] Not

[1] *Ch.Ch.*, II, viii, p. 222. [2] Quoted in *Puri Gazetteer*, p. 97.

[3] "Feeling depends upon action. The fundamental motive to action is fuller living, and the keenest satisfaction belongs to those acts which minister to the highest forms of life craved by the normal individual for himself and others. The most ideal affections and emotions are therefore those which spring from efforts to make actual and secure a thoroughly socialised human life, constantly moving for-

only this, it runs to all manner of excess. The delirious abandon and wild intoxication, resulting from some of Chaitanya's bhakti practices, cannot be justified as worthy of a true experience of God. The mind and the will are essential to personality, and their utter abdication surely cannot render us more God-like, but less. In emphasising feeling out of all proportion, and divorcing it from the obligations and requirements of the full personality, Chaitanya bhakti falls short of the moral ideal.

(*f*) Finally, it is difficult for one not reared in the Hindu environment to understand how, in a religious experience that has so much of mystic vision in it, the use of images can have so prominent a part. It is impossible to separate this element in Chaitanya's experience and excuse it as non-essential. If not absolutely central in the practice of Chaitanya's bhakti, it is so intertwined with it as to be inextricable. The image of Jagannāth was the object of his constant worship during all the Purī sojourn, and his words about the śālagrāma, quoted in Chapter VI, show the place it had in his private devotions. The common defence of image-worship, that it is a necessary aid for ignorant and spiritually undeveloped folk, manifestly cannot be applied to Chaitanya, one of Bengal's greatest sons. The practice, it must be admitted, is a blemish on the character of his mystic experience. Compared with another spiritual seer of Bengal, the Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore, sitting all the night in mystic communion under his tree at Bolpur, the picture of Chaitanya, weeping over his black stone and going through the mummery of bathing and feeding it, seems to belong to a distinctly lower order of spiritual attainment.

Eroticism and its Significance

There remains, for the completion of this study, only the consideration of the erotic element in the

ward through the free and harmonised activity of the individual members of the society" (Ames, *Psychology of Religious Experience*, p. 336).

mysticism of these two religions. We have seen how Vaishṇava and Christian mysticism belong to the same general class, in which the thought of, and longing for, the divine is expressed in personal terms and the imagery used is drawn from human relationships, even the most passionate. The mysticism of the Bengal Vaishṇavas with the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa stories as its centre and basis, is of a very decidedly erotic character. There is a tendency to excuse or justify this eroticism, on the ground that in Christian mysticism the same thing can be found. That there is erotic imagery to be found in the history of Christian mysticism is quite true, but that it can be conceived of as comparable, either in character or extent, with that which attaches to the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult, is very wide of the mark. Let us see what the facts are.

The symbolism characterising this type of mysticism in the Christian Church is that of the marriage relation. This usage had its rise in the Old Testament. Certain expressions of the great prophets of Israel, likening the relation of Jehovah and the Hebrew people to that of husband and wife, but more particularly the allegorical use of the book called the Song of Songs, were its fountain source.[1] The Song of Songs is a collection of Hebrew love and marriage songs, such as were sung by the bride and groom at the wedding festival. They are full of the passionate, sensuous appeal and frankness of description characteristic of Oriental love poetry. The early Fathers of the Christian Church took over from Jewish writers the habit of treating this book allegorically, and Origen's commentary, in the third century, gave this traditional method the authority of a great name. In Christian hands the bridegroom of the song was identified with Christ and the bride was represented by the Church, or, in later mediæval days, almost exclusively by the soul of the believer. This Song did not have much use until the widespread

[1] Greek ideas from the Mysteries also contributed in the case of Origen; cf. Inge, op. cit., Appendix D.

monastic life of the Middle Ages produced conditions peculiarly suited to it. In the twelfth century St. Bernard preached his famous 86 sermons on the Song of Songs, starting a new current in Christian mysticism of deep emotional appeal, which developed "the pattern of a peculiar kind of mysticism, which indulges in kisses and embraces far exceeding the limitations of Christian mysticism."[1] The great development of monastic life among both men and women, with its celibacy and its denial of the home and the normal instincts of humanity, proved fruitful soil for this hectic type.[2] Among the nuns of the Church, trained to look upon themselves as brides of Christ, bound to him in spiritual marriage, mysticism was transformed "from an affair of the mind into an affair of the heart, into a well bubbling over with emotion."[3]

It would be a gross misunderstanding to suppose that all use of the marriage symbolism among the mediæval mystics was an erotic use. The majority of those who made use of it, and certainly the greatest mystics, were largely free from eroticism.[4] The fact remains, however, that among the lesser female mystics of this period, we find the use of this passionate song of Hebrew love leading many into language that is not only distasteful, but positively repugnant to the Christian consciousness of to-day. The reason is not far to seek. Modern psychological research and experimentation make it fairly clear that in these nuns we have well-defined neurotic types, *i.e.* marked by nervous instability. They betray all the symptoms that are familiar to the student of pathology to-day. The records of their experiences show a considerable

[1] Lehman, *Mysticism in Heathendom and Christendom*, p. 158.

[2] "The extraordinarily frequent and circumstantial use of marriage as a symbol of the soul's relation to God or Christ, can hardly be a mere accident of figurative language. Celibacy is undoubtedly a factor" (Coe, *The Psychology of Religion*, p. 279). Cf. also Inge, op. cit., p. 37.

[3] Lehman, *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[4] "The descriptions of spiritual marriage which the great mystics have left are singularly free from physical imagery" (Underhill, op. cit., p. 165).

amount of ill-health, tendency to trances, visions, hallucinations, epileptic-like seizures, and such-like hysteric symptoms. In the sensuous form which the mystic experience took, we see the breaking out of normal human needs and instincts which had been severely repressed in the life of the cloister. In the words of a recent writer, "It is quite obvious that, in many cases, enforced celibacy resulted in the transference to the human person of Christ of feelings which were denied their legitimate outlet, and that such a cult led to religious amorousness not only strongly repellent to the healthy spiritual instinct, but also fraught with grave moral peril."[1]

Two points should be clear from the foregoing. Firstly, the distinctive outbreak of erotic tendencies in Christian mysticism of the Middle Ages was due largely to the repressive conditions of monastic life acting on neurotic types. Secondly, the imagery which lent itself to and inflamed this tendency, was almost wholly of the Old Testament, and does not belong to the body of Christian teaching.[2] Indeed, the Song of Solomon

[1] Herman, op. cit., p. 222. Cf. also Taylor, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 413 ff. "Who has not marvelled that the relationship of marriage should make so large a part of the symbolism through which monks and nuns expressed the soul's love of God? . . . did not the holy priest, the monk, the nun, feel and know that marriage was the greatest human relationship? So they drew from it the most adequate allegory of the soul's communion with its maker: differently according to their sex, with much emotion and even with unseemly imaginings they thought and felt the love of God along the ways of wedded union and even bridal passion."

[2] Criticism may possibly be levelled at this statement in that it takes no account of the use by Jesus himself of the bridegroom and marriage feast symbolism, or of St. Paul's great passage in Ephesians, where he uses marriage as symbolising Christ's relation to his Church. It is true that Jesus likened himself and his disciples to a bridegroom in the midst of his friends, and spoke of the gathering of peoples from all the earth in the heavenly kingdom, using the figure of a marriage feast. But I maintain that this imagery, and that used by St. Paul, is very different from the passionate language of the Song of Songs, where the sex interest is plainly dominant. The eroticism under discussion plainly reveals its kinship with this source rather than with the metaphor of Jesus, spoken as it was to men and applying particularly to them.

could be omitted from the Bible and not affect Christian thought in the slightest. Modern critical method, common to all research, has placed these Hebrew love songs in their proper setting, and stripped away the mass of extreme and often ludicrous allegory that had been reared upon them.

One further point should be perfectly clear. I have said that the erotic is a minor element in Christian mysticism. This becomes evident when we realize that in its nearly two thousand years of history the erotic note is practically non-existent, except during the mediæval period dealt with. It is not only that the majority who use the marriage symbolism are free from eroticism, but the more significant fact that the great stream of Christian mysticism has flowed in other channels and has made use of other imagery altogether. It is a striking fact that the marriage symbolism is confined almost entirely to the cloistral life of mediæval monasticism. The symbols made familiar by Christ's own teaching, the figure of the vine, the abiding life, the bread and wine of the sacrament, and Paul's vivid ideas of the indwelling Christ in the believer, and the mystical body of Christ—these have been the chief determinants of Christian mysticism down through the years, both before and since the Middle Ages. Here is the true home of any mysticism that can be called Christian, and it is a realm far removed from the sensuousness of the erotic ecstacy.

I have dealt with this point somewhat at length, in order that we might be perfectly clear about the com-

A more important criticism may be that the treatment of Christian eroticism in the text is negative and subsidiary, omitting the great positive fact of the influence of Jesus. I admit this, although my purpose in the text is of very real importance, namely, to make vividly clear the great and vital difference between the scriptural sources of this eroticism in the two religions. As to the main reason for Christianity's comparative freedom from the erotic, there can be no doubt. It is due to the personality of Jesus and the ideal of love set forth in his life, producing at all times, wherever his Spirit is really known, a wholesomeness in religious experience that is the surest check to all erotic tendencies.

parison of Christian and Vaishṇava mysticism in this respect. From the above it will be evident at once that the parallelism cannot be carried very far, nor can there be much in the way of a palliative extracted from it. The facts about the eroticism of the two mysticisms, strictly speaking, do not admit of comparison; they constitute rather a contrast, which may be briefly stated in this fashion:

1. *Source.* In Christian erotic mysticism the chief literary source is non-Christian, forming no part of the New Testament literature and teaching which are determinative for Christian devotion. The allegorical teaching based upon it is rejected to-day as being unhistorical and invalid.

In Chaitanya Vaishṇavism the literary source is the body of sacred scriptures themselves. The religion of the sect centres in the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa stories; they are the fountain source of all its devotion. Its eroticism therefore flows from its very heart.

2. *Character.* In Christian eroticism the symbolism is entirely drawn from marriage. The Hebrew songs are sensuous indeed, but they are of pure and lawful love. The symbol itself is high and pure, the offensiveness lies in its use as a channel for suppressed sex-feeling by weak creatures in the guise of devotion to the Highest and Holiest.

In the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult the symbolism is not drawn from the pure imagery of marriage, but from that of illicit passion. The relation of the two is that of paramour and mistress, for that is the heart of the doctrine of *parakīya*, which triumphed in the sect. This interpretation is evident in most of the literature.

3. *Value.* In Christian mysticism the erotic is held to be a distinct fall below the general level of mystic expression. It represents conditions of life and experience usually abnormal and often pathological. It is not only offensive to Christian taste, but is felt to be morally reprehensible.

Among the Chaitanyas the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult and all connected with it is exalted as a sublime allegory. Its imagery of sensuous illicit passion is held to be the highest possible symbol of spiritual aspiration, and imaginative participation in it is commended as the path to the highest religious experience.

4. *Proportion.* In Christian mysticism the erotic is a minor element, negligible outside of the mediæval period.

Among the Chaitanyas their mystical experience is almost wholly governed by the erotic. The religious experience of the sect moves entirely within the circle of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult. It is steeped in the erotic and moulded by it.

The modern student of religion is forced to conclude that the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa myth is an utterly insufficient and precarious, as well as unworthy, basis for religion. And

this is true, whether it be taken as literal fact or treated as an allegory. A theology and a religious experience so founded cannot persist in the light of modern knowledge, or provide for the needs of educated men. It seems clear that by Chaitanya, together with the theologians and singers of the sect, the whole myth was taken as literal fact. The Purāṇic stories appear in the literature of the sect as the basis of the theology and life, and there is no suggestion of its being an allegory. To them all it is manifestly religious history.[1] But at one breath of modern thought this ancient Purāṇic world tumbles in ruins.

The allegorical method of interpretation is the desperate alternative. It is the attempt, under the pressure of modern thought, to spiritualise the myth by reading it all as symbolism of religious truth. It would appear, however, to be doomed to futility. It imposes too great a strain upon the intelligence, and saddles the religious life with an intolerable burden of sensuality and ethical unwholesomeness to be constantly idealised. The load, indeed, is too heavy for the allegory. Like an aeroplane too heavily weighted, it cannot soar in the clouds because of the material handicap that holds it to the earth. Even so inveterate a believer in the spiritual interpretation of this eroticism as Dr. Sen finds it rather heavy going at times. He admits of Vidyāpati, one of the greatest of the Vaishṇava singers, that "there is not much of spirituality, but a good deal of sensuality, in his earliest love songs."[2] He speaks of the "exuberance of sensuousness," "the scenes of sensuality and lust, redeemed by others which are platonic and spiritual,"[3] and says the "songs of Vidyāpati would never have passed for religious writings, if in the last canto he had not suddenly risen high above such sentiments, and

[1] Paṇdit Sītanāth Tattvabhūshan points this out in a recent study of the Vaishṇava literature: "Neither the authors of the Pnrāṇas nor their latter-day exponents and followers, including Chaitanya and his disciples, *offer even the slightest clue to such an interpretation*" (allegorical). *The Indian Messenger*, March 27th, 1921.

[2] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 141. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

repeatedly given to the whole story a spiritual interpretation."[1] But this redeeming touch is difficult to find, nor is its spiritual significance so clear to an ordinary reader. Indeed, time and again such interpretation seems hopelessly far-fetched. But, granted this spiritual note at the end of a poem admittedly sensual, the question remains, Is this the kind of foundation on which religion can exist ?

Other writers of Bengal have had a different idea of this literature. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, an honoured name in Bengali literary annals, himself a leader in the neo-Kṛishṇa revival, unhesitatingly speaks of Vidyāpati as a poet of sensual love, not of the higher love which "is the offspring of the reason."[2] Benoy Kumar Sarkar, whose sociological writings have made his name known to Western as well as Eastern readers, says, "The treatment of love by the Vaishṇava poets, by Vidyāpati in particular, is so plainly and emphatically in the language of the senses, that it is impossible to read any supersensual meaning into it. If sexual love is mysticism, Vidyāpati is a mystic."[3] Paṇḍit Sītanāth Tattvabhūshan says, "The picture of Kṛishṇa in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas, especially in the later Purāṇas, was drawn by men who were rather poets than pious men, and had very wrong notions of morality. And now, whatever good Vaishṇava poetry may have done in the past, when it was believed as history and religion, it is being found out as mere poetry without any historical or spiritual foundation."[4] Sir R. Bhandarkar lends the weight of his name, as we have seen, to this conception of the nature of much of the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa literature.

Mr. Sarkar's essay is a trenchant plea for the abandonment of the allegorical method, and the applica-

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 144-45.
[2] Knight, *The Poison Tree* (English version of *Bishabṛiksha*), p. 207.
[3] *Love in Hindu Literature*, Preface, i.
[4] *The Indian Messenger*, December 4th, 1921.

tion to all this love poetry of the sane methods of critical study which rule in other realms of literature and art. In other words, he applies to this poetry exactly the same method which has rid the Song of Songs of all the extraneous mass of allegory which had fastened upon it in Christian history. The result is a clear gain to literature in the acknowledgment of this lyricism for what it is, masterpieces of sex-love, the glorification of the sex interest as supreme. To persist in treating such songs as teaching the divine truths of religion is as poor criticism as it is bad religion. The latest attempt to set forth the Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult as a divine allegory is in the sumptuous edition of Vidyāpati's poems, edited by Dr. Coomaraswamy, intended especially for the European public. The editing of this work in the interest of the allegory is the special target of Mr. Sarkar's criticism. The sex interest is so central as to render void all effort to make it appear religious.

> Really, it is impossible to recognise any other pleasures in the world of Vidyāpati. Coomaraswamy feels this, and has tried to whitewash it according to his ideas of Hindu morality, Hindu standards of domestic decorum, and Hindu traditional interpretation of Vaishṇava thought. The attempt has been a huge failure, and has imparted to his introduction and elucidation an air of duplicity and insincerity.
>
> The one fallacy which is responsible for this dualism and inconsistency of the veteran philosopher-poet-critic consists in his persistent refusal, even in spite of himself, to admit the fact that it is sex, and nothing but sex, that supplies the motif of Vidyāpati's art.[1]

What applies to Vidyāpati applies also to many others of the Vaishṇava lyrics.

In conclusion, it must be said that Rādhākṛishṇaism presents bhakti with objects and a symbolism of worship which are ethically unworthy. This is the supreme difficulty. We may be told by Dr. Sen that "from this story every suspicion of grossness is understood to be eliminated, and the drama played out, amidst the pastoral scenery of the banks of the Jumna, conveys only the purity and holiness of a hymn of worship."[2] But

[1] Op. cit., pp. 47-48.

[2] *H.B.L.L.*, p. 118.

this is simply futile when the Purāṇic stories are what they are and when—by Dr. Sen's own confession—the master-singer of this idyl glorifies sensuality and lust. The cult offers to the worshipper as the most sublime symbolism that which is admittedly in contravention of the dearest ideals of the Hindu home. No Hindu could for an instant tolerate the actions of Rādhā in his own household, or desire for his daughter the hand of a young man patterned upon the Kṛishṇa of the Purāṇas. Thus the symbolism of religion and the most sacred objects of its devotion are in perpetual conflict with the ideals of social order and moral integrity. How, it may well be asked, can religion so conceived and expressed be a living spring? The answer is written plain in the history of the sect.

We hesitate to state baldly the unworthiness of this cult, for fear it may be attributed to "Christian arrogance." This frank avowal by an Indian scholar may suffice as the ethical judgment of modern thought upon it: "His idea of God as an embodied being unceasingly thirsting after enjoying the charms of a woman, and his ideal of a bhakta as a woman ever seeking to make her lover happy, by giving him the pleasure of union with her—can it ever save any Church from moral corruption?"[1]

Nor will it do to say that the object of faith makes no difference, that bhakti is the great thing and it matters not what produces it.[2] This is an old and familiar argument, but the history of religion as well as modern psychology are against it. History is strewn with discarded objects of faith which could no longer minister to men's enlarging experience. Men grow by their admirations. We are moulded by our ideals. Ideas tend to action by the law of the mind. Therefore, the vast importance of what we think. "As a man thinketh in his heart, is so he." And the highest of all thoughts, the thought of God—is it immaterial how

[1] Tattvabhūshan, *The Indian Messenger*, November 27th, 1921.

[2] Cf. *V.L.*, pp. 184-85 and 216, where Dr. Sen virtually makes this plea.

we conceive of Him? And that to which we give the supreme loyalties of the heart, can we believe that it does not colour all of life?

We acknowledge fully and unreservedly the tremendous powers of devotion in the heart of Chaitanya. We pay homage to his passionate longing for the sense of God in his own soul. We have tried to set forth with sympathy and understanding the great qualities of heart and spirit for which he is justly revered. His humility, his joyousness, his true saintliness; and the lives of the many saintly men down to our day who have followed in his steps, have very greatly enriched the life of Bengal, and are for all time a part of the wonderful religious heritage of this people of India. But as we close this study we cannot be rid of the feeling of precious waste. The God-given powers of bhakti, so richly poured out in this movement, have been consecrated to that which is wholly unworthy of the Highest. What the choicest spirits have been able to transmute, has in the mass wrought degradation and dishonour to God. If only the loyalties of this passionate bhakti could be joined to the highest that men have ever known of God, how great would be that consummation! What might not be the result could these powers be dedicated to Christ and all the wealth of India's bhakti learn to lavish itself upon Him as its Supremely Adorable?

INDEX

ABADHUTA, 157
Abhidheya, 99
Abhisāra, 143
Achintyabhedābheda, 93, 103
Achyutānanda Dās, 74
Adam, Rev. W., 85
Adhikārīs, 179
Advaita, 38
Advaitācharya, 11, 17, 24, 31, 32, 45, 61, 62, 63, 75, 131, 150, 151
Advaita Prakāśa, 131
Advaita Maṅgala, 131
Agradvīp, 209
Ahiṁsā, 116 ; doctrine of the sect, 218
Akbar, 67
Ākhṛās, 37, 76, 139, 155 ; nature of, 166 ff.; presence of women in, 170 ff.; description of, 74 ff.; in Navadvīp, 174-75 ; in Calcutta, 175-76
Ālkhellā, 215
Allegorical method, failure of as interpretation, 144, 248, 250, 253-54
Ames, E. S., 247
Amiya Nimāi Charit, 80
Amṛita Bazar Patrikā, 80
Ānanda, 92
Anānta Dās, 75
Ancient Sanskrit Literature, 179
Antiquities of Orissa, 115, 185
Anurāgāvali, 135
Āratī, 177, 194
Archæological Department, 87
Archæological Survey, 73
Arcot, 37
Art, 67 ; of temples, 72-73, 87
Asceticism, 55
Ashṭaka, 88, 117
Assam, Chaitanya influence in, 75-76
Āul Chand, 213
Avatāra, 164, 176 ; not equivalent to incarnation, 229-30 ; significance of terms, 231
Avidya, 96

BĀBĀJĪ, 173
Bāghnāpāṛa, 64, 157, 209
Bahirbās, 164
Baladeva Vidyābhūshaṇa, 139
Bālagopāla, 142, 236
Balarāma Dās, 75, 147
Balijātrā melā, 185
Bambino, 237
Bāmunya, 76
Baṅgiya Sāhitya Parishat, 30
Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, 174, 254
Barendra Brāhman, 157
Bārshi, 154
Bartollah presses, 140
Bāśulī, 10
Bātsalya, 106, 236-37
Bāuls, 207, 214-15
Benares, 25, 46, 49, 107
Bengal, 400 years ago, 1-12 ; spread of Rādhā-Kṛishṇa cult in, 8-9 ; pilgrimages from, 43-44 ; influence of sect in, 81 ff.; writers of, 253
Bengali language, 81
Bengali literature, 81-82, 123 ff.
Bengal Peasant Life, 171, 200, 207
Bepin Bihari Gosvāmī, 150
Bernard, St., compared with Chaitanya, 244, 249
Beshāśrayavidhi, 162
Bezwada, 37
Bhabuk mahal, 155

Bhagavad-Gītā, 5
Bhagavān, 92
Bhāgavata Kumāra Gosvāmī Śāstri, 135, 150
Bhāgavatāmṛitam, 137
Bhāgavata Purāṇa, 6, 7, 11, 23, 54, 55, 75, 80, 88, 102, 107, 109, 128, 141, 164, 191
Bhāgirathī, 114, 169, 181
Bhakta, 18, 31, 32, 65; identical with the good man, 116
Bhakti, rise of, 5; outburst in Nadia, 19 ff.; Chaitanya's contribution, 55; social consequences, 56-59, 82-83, 119 ff.; salvation through, 99-100; nature and sufficiency, 104 ff.; its cultivation, 109 ff.; esoteric teaching, 110, 112; emotions of, 112-13; images, 113-15, 247; shorter catechism, 115-16; superiority to mukti, 98, 228-29; five stages compared to Christian devotion, 235 ff.; mystical element, 237 ff.; defects of, 243 ff.; its powers and Christ, 257
Bhaktimārga, 99
Bhaktiratnākara, 70, 77, 134
Bhaktiratnāvali, 88
Bhaktirasāmṛitasindhu, 136, 138
Bhaktitattvasāra, 122
Bhaktiyoga, 34
Bhandarkar, 222, 254
Bhāratabarshīya Upāshak Sampradāya, 213
Bhāratī order, 29
Bhattacharya, J. N., 171
Bhāva-Sanmīlana, 143, 239
Bhedābheda, 7, 93
Bhek, 71, 130; requirements of, 162 ff.
Bhek-dhārī, 162, 164
Bhekāśrita Tattva Grantha, 165
Bhet, 181
Bhikshu, 12, 70, 162
Bhikshuṇi, 12, 70
Bhoga, 188
Bhogmālāvivaraṇa, 190
Bijoy Kṛishṇa Gosvāmī, 78, 214
Bijuli Khān, 48
Biography, a product of the movement, 82, 124 ff.
Bishabṛiksha, 174, 254
Bliss, 92, 105; nature of the Supreme, 221
Brahma, 94
Brahmachārīs, 156
Brāhman, 5
Brahmaputra, 76
Brahma Samāj, its Vaishṇava practices, 78-79; relation with Karttabhajās, 214
Brahma Saṁhitā, 39, 91, 138
Brahma Sūtras, 91, 102
Braj, 6, 9, 67, 95, 110
Brajbuli, 147
Brindāban, 6, 25, 26, 31, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 53, 56, 63; development of, 65-69, 72, 73, 74, 89, 95; the heavenly, 101, 126; residence at required, 164; Chaitanya shrines, 186, 229
Brindāban Fathers, 63, 103, 107, 122, 128
Brindāban Gosvāmīs, 66 ff., 133; their learning and devotion, 135, 136
Buddha, 35, 185
Buddhism, tantracism in, 9, 10; influence on Vaishṇavism, 11, 12; degraded mendicants of, 70-71

CALCUTTA, 73
Calcutta Review, 78, 85, 200
Caste, 1, 57, 58, 59, 85; Chaitanya's mixed attitude toward, 118 ff.; strength of, 164
Cauvery, 37
Cave, Sidney, 231
Chādar, 154, 163
Chaitanya, birth, 13; youth, 14-15; home, 13, 17; scholarship, 15-16; marriage, 15-16; personal charm, 16, 23, 30; character, 53-54, 257; conversion, 17-19, 22; sannyāsa, 28-31; southern tour, 35-42; Brindāban pilgrimage, 44-49; religious experience,

18-22, 39, 43-44, 47, 54-56, 225 ; nervous instability, 50, 223, 241; influence, 42, 52-54, 118, 124, 145 ; joyousness, 53, 55, 167 ; emotionalism, 19 ff., 47, 55, 58, 90, 222, 239, 245-46 ; eclectic worship, 38, 129 ; object of worship, 64-65, 96, 164, 182, 186-87 ; restoration of Brindāban, 65 ff.; attitude to caste, 57 ff., 118 ff.; contradictions, 120 ; last years, 40-51 ; death, 50, 51, 126, 132 ; spread of his cult, 73 ; debt to other sects, 89 ; eight verses, 90 ; considered an incarnation, 30, 95-96 ; influence on Purī temple worship, 114-15 ; attitude towards women, 130 ; emphasis on humility, 117, 218
Chaitanya and His Age, 59
Chaitanya and His Companions, 138
Chaitanya Bhāgavata, 62 ; its composition, 125, 127 ; its chief interest, 131
Chaitanya Charitāmṛita, 27, 29, 34, 36, 38 ; translation of, 22, 130 ; bhakti cult in, 48 ; chief source for study, 91 ; legendary elements, 95 ; sacred as scripture, 102, 128 ; doctrinal viewpoint, 126 ff.; robbery of MS., 133
Chaitanya Chandrodaya Nāṭaka, 34, 88, 130, 141
Chaitanya Dās, 75
Chaitanya Maṅgala, 50, 125-26, 128, 129
Charita, 130
Chakrapūja, 9
Chakra, 163
Chaṇḍāl, 120
Chaṇḍi, 3
Chaṇḍi Dās, 4, 10, 39, 108, 142
Charaṇāmṛita, 163, 192
Chattopadhyaya, N., 108
Chharidār, 155
Chidambaram, 37
Chingleput, 37
Chit power, 93
Christian Mysticism, 239
Coe, 241, 249
Conch, 163
Conjeeveram, 37
Conversion, 18, 72
Coomaraswamy, 232, 255
Cossimbazar, 81
Cowherds, Kṛishṇa the hero of, 281
Cross, the, its grandeur, 223 ; no parallel in Vaishṇavism, 226
Cuddapah, 37
Cupid, used to express idea of incarnation, 226

DĀBIR KHĀS, 45
Dacca, 73
Dakshiṇ Rāi, 3
Dakshiṇāchāri, 3
Dhamrāi, 182, 199, 205
Dānakelī Kaumudī, 140
Dance of Śiva, The, 231
Dancing, 21, 43-44, 48, 116
Daṇḍabat, 215
Danton, 185
Dautya, 143
Darbesh, 215-16
Darśan 114
Das, C. R., 81
Dāses, the six, 74
Dāsya, 106, 110, 235
Datta, Akshay Kumar, 213
Dehatattva, 214
Democracy, 83
Dey, Lal Bihari, 171, 207
Devotion. See Bhakti
Dhakkādakshiṇ, 12, 15, 174
Dharma, 95
Dharma Ṭhākkur, 3
Dhoti, 154, 163
Dhūpārati, 177, 192
Dibasi, 177
Dīkshā, 29, 66, 85, 211
Diprakāśikā, 137
Dolejātrā, 206
Dor, 163
Drama, 34, 37, 56, 108
Dualism, 93
Durgama Sangamaṇi, 138
Dvaitadvaita, 7

ECCLESIASTICISM, 121; in Chaitanya Vaishṇavism, 83-87
Ecstasy, ecstasies, 22, 23, 33, 44, 47, 51, 90, 146, 237, 239, 240, 241, 244, 251
Education, of girls and women, 85-86; among Gosvāmīs, 158; emancipating effects of, 160-61
Ekādaśī, 165, 191
Ekāntin, 165
Ektārā, 56
Emancipation. See Mukti
Epilepsy, 21
Emotionalism, 19 ff., 55, 240-41; defects of, 246
Eroticism, 9, 10; its source in the sect, 111, 226, 247 ff., 252; in Christian mysticism, 248-51; the comparison stated, 252
Esoteric teaching, its higher way, 111 ff.
Ethical teaching, 116-18; meagreness due to conception of world order, 116, 220 ff.; compared with Christian, 218 ff.
Evil, unrecognized as moral problem, 233

FAITH, 99, 105, 120; importance of its object, 256-57
Faqir, 57, 216
Farquhar, J. N., 9, 42
Faujdār, 158
Festivals, 43, 48, 73, 205 ff.
Feudatory states, 74
Francis, St., compared with Chaitanya, 244

GADĀDHARA, 152, 182, 183
Galilee, 83
Gaṇadveṣadīpikā, 137
Gandhi, 121
Ganges, 47, 48, 69; its water used in worship, 199
Ganguly, Bhudhar Chandra, 50
Garuda Stambha, 184
Gāthā Saptasatī, 9
Gaur, 14, 45, 49
Gaurachandrikā, 56, 145, 146, 147; described, 202
Gaurāṅga, 14, 20, 31, 54, 75, 79, 80, 81, 116
Gaur-Nitāi, 176, 182, 184, 194
Gaura Rāy, 183
Gaurī Dās, 183
Gayā, 17, 18, 19, 22
Ghoshpārā, 213
Ghose, Shishir Kumar, 80
Ghose, Motilal, 80
Gītā, 6, 79, 91, 95, 231
Gītagovinda, 4, 8, 9, 142
Goloka, 104
Gopāl Bhaṭṭa, 66, 137, 138, 162
Gopāla songs, 142
Gopāls, 64
Gopīchandaṇa, 163, 189
Gopī-līlā, 94, 142
Gopīnāth, 67
Gopīnāth Temple, at Brindāban, 67; at Purī, 184
Gopī myth, 112
Gopīs, 6, 96, 107, 109; importance of, 111, 112; incarnations of, 137
Gopiyantra, 56
God, idea of, 92 ff.; forms of, 95, 114; five kinds of mukti in, 98; conceived as personal love, 225-26; compared with Christian idea, 226-27
Godāvarī, 36, 37, 38
Gosāin, 67, 76
Gosvāmīs, 26; of Brindāban, 1, 127, 152; of Jaipur, 68, 152; of Kardaha, 150; Goishpur, 150; of Lata, 150; of Jirat, 151; of Chandannagore, 157; of Chakhundi, 151; of Śrīkhanda, 151; of Bāghnāpāṛa, 151; of Vikrampur, 152; of Kheturi, 152; of Navadvīp, 152; of Śāntipur, 151; origin, 149 ff.; functions, 153 ff.; character and standing, 156 ff.; death of, 209, 214
Gotras, 178
Govardhan, 47
Govinda, 39, 90
Govinda, Bhāshya, 139

Govinda Dās, 147
Govinda Dās (Karmakār), 129-30
Govindjī Temple, 67, 134
Govinda Līlāmṛita, 138
Grace, 225
Grierson, Dr. G., 246
Grihasṭhas, 149, 156, 160-61
Grihya Sūtras, 157
Growse, 66, 67
Guru, gurus, 18, 29, 38; channels of revelation, 101-3; power of, 103, 149, 158-59; reverence for, 103, 153; drawn from non-Brāhmans, 121; duties of, 153 ff.
Guru padāśraya doctrine, 149

HĀLA SATAVĀHANA, 9
Hari, idea of, as God, 92 ff., 103
Haribhaktivilāsa, 91, 96, 119; description of, 137; 138, 139, 186, 191
Hari Charan Dās, 131
Haridās, 25, 57, 118, 119; Purī ākhṛā of, 185
Harināma, 164, 196-98, 200-1
Hari Sabhā, 86, 87
Heaven, doctrine of, 100-1, 228-29; barren conception, 229
Hemalatā Devī, 85, 133
Herman, E., 243, 250
Hindu and Muhammadan Feasts, 205
Hindu Castes and Sects, 171, 215
Hinduism, 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 35, 57, 62, 87, 159, 160, 231
Hindu society, strength of caste, 77; influence of Chaitanya, 56-59, 83; marriage, 109; both upheld and defied, 118, 123
History of Bengali Language and Literature, 107, 128, 139
History of Sanskrit Literature, 178
Hyderabad, 38
Hymnology, 141 ff.; no accident in religion, 234. See Songs
Hysteria, 21, 240, 243, 250
Hlādinī, 93-94

IDOLATRY, 113
Illusion, 96, 98, 103
Incarnation, doctrine of, 94 ff.; 229 ff.; differences in conception, 230 ff.
Images, use of, 113-15; one of the earliest in sect, 185
Imagination, in religion, 231
Indian Messenger, 252, 254, 256
Inge, Dean, 239, 243, 248
Intuition, 101
Ishan Nāgara, 131
Islam, its rule, 1, 45, 72; converts from, 23, 25, 48, 57, 118, 119, 216; its worship, 54
Ishṭa devatā, 186
Iśvar Purī, 17, 18, 29

JADUNANDANA DĀS, 112, 133, 134
Jagāi, 234
Jaganmohinī sect, 216
Jagannāth, 33; chief festival, 43-44, 206; Chaitanya's devotion to, 113-15, 184, 185
Jagannātha Dās, 75
Jagannātha Miśra, 13, 17
Jagannātha Vallabha, 41
Jahnavī, 85, 132, 183
Janmāsṭhami, 165, 206
Japa, japmālā, 192; decrease in its use, 197; 198; characteristic of Chaitanya Vaishṇavas, 200-1
Jat Vairāgīs, 178-79
Jayadeva, 4, 8, 9, 10, 39, 108
Jayānanda, 125
Jesus Christ, 79, 80; ethics of, 218-19; social hope, 224-25; the Cross, 223; influence on mysticism 243; safeguard against eroticism, 250; supreme object of bhakti, 257
Jhulana jātrā, 206
Jīva Gosvāmī, 66, 74, 91; works by, 137-38
Jīva power, 93
Jīvadayā, 116
Jiyad, 36
Jñāna, 98, 105
Jñāna Dās, 147

Joy, 234-35
Jugal Kiśor Temple, 67
John of the Cross, St., 242
Jones, R. M., 245
Jot Bañgla Temple, 87
Jumna, 47, 48

KĀLNĀ, 64, 175, 183
Kaliyuga, 95
Kāma, 111, 226
Kāmgāyatri, 164
Kanarese country, Chaitanya's influence in, 37, 42
Kañchannagore, 31
Kanarese Literature, History of, 42
Kañchnapāṛā, 213
Kanouj Brāhmans, 17
Kardaha, 64, 70, 71, 150
Kaṛchā, 124, 128, 129
Karma, 99, 104, 105
Karma Mīmāṁsā, 40
Karṇānanda, 86, 112, 133, 138
Kartāl, 20, 79
Kārtik, 175, 188
Karttābhajās, 213-14
Kathakas, 83-84
Kātwā, 29, 31
Kaupina, 163, 164
Kavikarṇapūra, 34, 88, 130, 141
Kavirājas, 149
Keśava Bhāratī, 29, 49
Keshub Chandra Sen, 78-79
Keśa samādhi, 183
Kheturi, 73, 152, 209
Khole, 20, 79
Kingdom of God, 225, 230, 236, 246
Kingdom of Heaven, 229
Kirtan, described, 20-21, 201-3; scenes of, 43; importance in the sect, 54, 58, 110; 120, 225
Kiśoribhajās, 211
Kolhapur, 38
Kṛishṇa, as incarnation, 5, 230 ff.; in the sects, 6 ff.; in Chaitanya's experience, 19 ff., 230; highest form of deity, 92, 95; nature and powers, 92, 95; known in guru, 102, 104; the sole male, 111; how manifested, 114; as moral ideal, 231, 256
Kṛishṇa-bhakti, 34, 37, 120
Kṛishṇadās Kavirāj, 108, 126, 127, 133; works by, 138
Kṛishṇakarṇāmṛita, 39, 138
Kṛishṇārchanadīpikā, 138
Kulin, 117, 157
Kumbakonam, 37
Kumbha melā, 48
Kūrmāvatāra, 36

LAGHUTOSHINI, 138
Lalita Mādhava, 140
Lehman, 249
Lep, 197
Liberation. See Mukti
Līlā, 6, 15, 94, 111, 221
Līlāśuka Bilvamañgala, 39, 138
Lochana Dās, 128
Lokanātha Gosvāmī, 25, 47, 127
Lord Gaurāṅga, 80
Love, soul's highest state, 99, 105; essence of salvation, 100; Rādhā the ideal of, 106, 108-9; psychology of, 112-13, 135; its philosophy, 136; songs of, 143 ff.; its two senses, 226; sensual aspects, 253-54
Love in Hindu Literature, 145, 254
Lyrics, limitations of, 141; non-ethical, 221; 235; sexualism of, 255-56. See Songs

MADAME GUYON, 239
Madan Mohan, 67, 87
Madhāi, 234
Mādhurya, 106, 237
Madura, 37
Mādhavendra Purī, 66, 88
Madhva, Madhvāchārya, 7, 37, 38
Mādhvas, 7, 10, 24, 29, 38, 40, 88, 89
Mā-Gosāin, 86
Mahābhārata, 5, 6, 254
Mahābhāva, 96, 107
Mahanta, 76, 149; how chosen, 169 ff.; functions, 170

Mahāprabhū, 40
Mahāprabhū's bāṛi, 180, 182, 187
Mahāpurushya, 75
Mahaśay, 213
Mahotsava, 32, 157 ; at death of vairāgī, 177 ; nature of, 209-10
Maithilī, 147
Maḷula, 76
Malla Rājās, 72
Malabar, 37
Man, doctrine of, 103-4
Manasā Devī, 3
Manava Dharmaśāstra, 34
Manipur, 73
Man-lion, 36
Mantra, 65, 154, 164 ; for Gaurāṅga, 190
Manu, 34
Manuscripts, 40, 83, 133
Marāṭhā country, 38, 42
Marjyādā, 119
Marriage, 70 ; in Hindu society, 109, 154 ; Christian mystic symbolism, 248-51
Mātājī, 86, 173
Maṭha, 37, 76
Mathurā, 47, 65, 66, 109, 137
Māthura, 143
Mathurā Mahātmya, 67, 137
Max Müller, 178
Māyā, 93, 96, 104
Mayurbhanj, 12, 74
Mazumdar, P. C., 78, 79
Meaning and Value of Mysticism, 243
Melās, 48, 70, 73 ; in Orissa, 185, 207 ; of long standing, 208
Mediæval Mind, The, 244
Mendicancy, chief feature of ākhṛās, 167
Mendicants, 24, 25, 46, 61, 70, 71, 83 ; rules for, 165
Mercy, expressed in vegetarianism, 116
Milkmaids, 94, 96, 111, 143. See Gopīs
Middle Ages, mystics of, 242 ; monasticism of, 249
Mīmāṁsaka, 40
Mithilā, 4, 89
Mitra, R. L., 88, 185
Mleccha, 165
Monastery, 37
Monasticism, influence on Christian eroticism, 249-52
Monism, 38, 93
Morality, 76
Mukundarāma, 85
Mukti, 97, 100 ; prejudice against, 98, 228, 229
Murāri Gupta, 124, 128
Muttra, 65, 137
Mysore, 37
Mysticism, 238
Mysticism, 112 ; bhakti and Christian compared, 237 ff.; classification,238; parallel experiences, 238-40 ; modern psychology on, 240-41, 249-50 ; tests of value, 241-43 ; defects of bhakti, 245-47 ; eroticism in, 247 ff.; symbols of, 251
Mysticism in Heathendom and Christendom, 249

NADIA, 13, 15, 17, 31, 32, 64
Nagarkīrtan, 23, 27, 78, 80, 205
Nāgās, 207
Nāmābali, 177
Nāmakīrtan, 75, 110. See Harināma
Nārada Sūtra, 105
Narahari Sarkār, 65, 147, 152
Narahari Chakravartī, 134
Narasiṁha, 36
Narāyaṇa, 164
Narbada, 38
Narottama Datta, 72, 73, 121, 131, 135, 139, 152
Narottama Vilāsa, 135
Nature, 104
Navadvīp, 4, 13, 19, 24, 30, ākhṛās in, 174, 175 ; temples of, 180-81, 187, 209
Navya Nyāya logic, 4, 33
Neo-Kṛishṇa movement, 79
Neo-Vaishṇavism, 80
Neṛā-Neṛīs, 70, 71, 207, 212

New Testament, 235, 236 ; quotations from, 225, 228, 235, 236, 243
Nīlāmbar Chakravartī, 14
Nimāi, 14, 21, 24, 31
Nimbārka, 7, 8
Nimbārkas, 7, 9, 89
Nityānanda, 24, 27, 45, 53, 59 ; his leadership, 61-63 ; his centre, 64, 71; 131; primacy of his descendants, 150 ; social taint, 157
Nityānanda Dās, 132
Notes on the Races, Castes, and Trades of East Bengal, 199

ORISSA, Buddhism in, 11 ; 13, 53 ; winning of, 73 ff., 134 ; Gosvāmīs of, 152 ; veneration of Chaitanya in, 184 ff.

PADA, 84, 134, 142 ff., 216. See Songs
Padakalpataru, 147
Pada-karttās, 145
Pāikpāṛā, 73
Pal, B. C., 79, 81
Paṇḍharpur, 38, 39
Paṇḍits, 4, 26, 49, 100
Pañchagavya, 163
Pañchāyet, 153
Pānihāti, 173, 209
Parakīya, 133, 139, 251
Parakīyavādīs, 107, 108
Paramānanda Sen, 130
Parikrama, 206
Pātañjali, 40
Pathāns, 48
Paul, St., 229, 235, 240, 243, 251
Pilgrims, 43, 44
Pilgrimage, 35, 45, 46, 64, 75, 119, 122, 130
Prabhū, 30
Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī, 49
Prākṛit, 9
Prakṛitī sādhana, 215
Prameya Ratnāvali, 139
Prasāda, 14, 41, 45, 119 ; of gurus, 154, 188 ; 195
Prayoga, 47, 48
Pratāpapur, 185
Pratāpa Rudra, 33, 42, 45, 53, 64, 115
Preachers, 74
Prema, 226
Premavilāsa, 132-35
Prembhakti, 219
Premabhakti Chandrikā, 122, 139
Premaratnāvali, 139
Priests, function of, 193 ff.
Priti, 99
Propaganda, 60, 73
Prostitutes, 150, 171-72
Pūjaka, 194
Pūjārī, 173, 187, 194
Purāṇas, 5, 40, 67, 102, 253, 255
Purī, Chaitanya's first experiences in, 30 ff.; Bengal pilgrims, 43, 50 ; Chaitanya's influence, 74, 114-15 ; Chaitanya shrines and relics, 184-85
Purushottama Siddhānta Vagīsa, 135
Pūrva Rāg, 143
Psychology of Religion, 249
Psychology of Religious Experience, 247

RĀDHĀ, 6, 7, 8 ; rise of her cult, 9 ; 10, 11, 21, 25, 47, 56, 89, 96 ; exalted as ideal of bhakti, 106-7 ; differing interpretation of, 107 ff.; degrading element in Vaishṇavism, 222, 255
Rādhā Dāmodar, 67
Rādhā-Kṛishṇa, 7, 8 ; Sahajiyā influence on cult of, 10 ; 23, 39, 56, 65, 89, 108, 115-16, 142, 145, 146 ; amours justifying corruption, 211, 214 ; source of eroticism, 252 ; images, 182 ; associated in worship, 189, 194
Rādhākṛishṇaism, 9, 222 ; unworthy basis for religion, 252, 255-56
Rādhāshṭamī, 206
Rādhikā, 96
Rāgānuga, 109, 110, 237
Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa, 66

Raghunātha Dās, 66, 114, 127 ; works by, 138
Rājahmundry, 36, 38
Rājshahi, 73
Rājatattva, 111, 238
Rāma, 5, 176, 182, 216
Rāmānanda Rāy, 36, 38, 42, 53, 115, 140, 222
Rāmāyaṇa, 5
Rām Charan Pal, 213
Rāmī, 10, 40
Rāmeśvaram, 37
Rāmkelī, 45, 46
Ramnad, 37
Rāhri Brāhman, 157
Rāsa, 111
Rasa, 92
Rās jātrā, 206
Rasikā Maṅgal, 134
Rasikā Murāri, 74, 134, 152
Rās-līlā, 111, 116
Ratha-jātrā, 206
Rayganj, 175
Reason, disparagement of, 101, 245
Re-birth, 99, 100
Redemption, Hindu and Christian, 231
Relics of Chaitanya, 183, 184
Revelation, doctrine of, 101-3
Religion, ethical test of, 243
Rice, E. P., 42
Rhetoric, 136
Risley, Sir H., 178
Rites of the Twice Born, 199
Ritual, works on, 136, 137 ; temple, 187 ; ākhṛā, 190
Ritualism, 121
Roman Catholic Church, 237
Rosary, 200 ; worshipped, 181
Ruchi, 101
Rukmiṇī, 25
Rūpa Gosvāmī, 45, 48, 57, 66, 67, 68, 87, 91, 118 ; his works, 136-37, 140

ŚACHĪ, 13, 14, 31, 32 ; worshipped, 181
Sacrifice, 116
Sādhana, 105
Sādhāran Samāj, 214
Sādhu, 57
Sahaja dharma, 211
Sahajiyā, 9, 10, 107, 139 ; doctrine and cult, 210 ; 211, 212
Saintliness, 72 ; Sts. Bernard and Francis compared with Chaitanya, 244
Śaivite, 33, 37
Śaivism, 81, 89
Sākār Mallik, 45
Sakhīs, 111
Śākta sect, 3, 9, 10, 75, 77 ; its sacrifices, 116, 160
Sakhya, 106, 236
Śakti, 3
Śaktism, 9
Śālagrām, 114, 194
Sālokya, 98
Salvation, 9 ; doctrine of, 98 ff., 227 ff.; through sexual passion, 10, 211
Samādhi, 177
Saṁhitā, 6
Sambhoga-Mīlana, 143
Sāmīpya, 98
Sāṁkhya System, 5, 40
Sammilanī, 80, 87
Saṁyogī, 179
Sanātana, 45, 49, 57, 66, 68, 87 ; his great work, 91, 137 ; 107, 118 ; prejudice against him, 137, 215
Sanātana Miśra, 16, 152
Sāṇdilya Sūtras, 105
Śaṅkara, Śaṅkarāchārya, 7, 8, 37, 71, 97, 98
Śaṅkara Deva, 75, 76
Saṅkīrtan, 27, 32 ; chief feature of the sect, 54, 58, 78 ; Chaitanya's creation, 95-96 ; in public worship, 201-5. See Kīrtan
Sannyāsa, 16, 28, 29, 124
Sannyāsī, 13, 17, 18, 24, 29-30, 33, 34, 35, 49, 53, 162
Saṅskāra, 163
Saṅskāradīpikā, 139
Śānta, 106, 235

Śāntipur, 23, 31, 45, 62, 75, 151
Saptasṭhān, 185
Saraṅgaraṅgadā, 138
Sarkar, Benoy Kumar, 145, 254-55
Sarkar, Jadanath, 22, 130
Sārshti, 98
Sārupya, 98
Sarvabhauma, 29, 33-35, 42, 53, 114
Śāstras, 34, 101
Sat-chit-ānanda, 92
Satsandarbha, 138
Sattvas, 76
Sattvik, 44
Sāyujya, 98
Schoolmen of Europe, 136
Sen, Dr. D. C., 48, 58, 59, 68, 108, 112, 129, 131, 133, 146, 147, 242, 253, 255
Sevādāsīs, 170
Sevāit, 119, 180, 181
Sensuality, in the lyrics, 147-48; in Vidyāpati, 253-55
Sexual passion, in religion, 9-10, 211, 214-15
Shains, 216
Shoṛaśopachāra pūjā, 187
Shrines, 38, 40, 129; new, at Navadvip, 181; incongruities of, 182-83; in Orissa, 185-86
Siddha, 165
Sin, ideas of, 96 ff., 232 ff.
Siṅgaravata, 150
Śiva, 3, 25, 38, 47
Smārta, 7, 157, 160
Smṛiti, 7, 40, 91, 157
Sñāna jātrā, 207
Social teaching, by-product of bhakti, 56 ff., 120 ff.; inconsistent, 118 ff.; revolutionary elements, 57, 82; defects, 83, 224; achievements, 82-83, 223; compared with Christian, 223 ff.
Society of Friends, 244
Song of Songs, 244; influence on Christian mysticism, 248, 250-51
Song, songs, 9, 20-21; about Chaitanya, 30, 65 145 ff., Chaitanya's influence on, 56, 145-46; extent, 82; influence, 84; described, 141 ff.; sensuousness, 144 ff., 155-56. See Lyrics
Spirit, The, no parallel to Christian doctrine, 228
Spiritual Life, The, 241
Sport, 6, 94, 101, 111, 115-16. See Līlā
Śrāddha, 18, 122, 165; dispensed with, 177; 179
Śrauta Sūtras, 157
Śrīdharasvāmī, 107
Śrī Gauraṅga, 50
Śrī Kūrman, 36
Śriṅgeri, 37, 38
Śrīnivāsa, Āchārya, 72, 85, 131, 152
Śrī Purushottam, 114
Śrīraṅgam, 37
Śrī Rūpa Sevā, 211
Śrī Vaishṇava, 6, 7, 37, 40
Śrivāsa, 19, 22, 23, 24, 27, 125
Śrīvāsaṅgam, 181
Stevenson, Mrs. S., 199
Sub-sects, 212 ff.
Sūdra, 36, 121, 130
Supreme, The, 92, 93, 95, 101. See God
Suvarna Vaṇika, 61, 62
Svakīya, 107, 139
Śvakīyavādīs, 107
Svarūpa Dāmodāra, 124, 127
Swoon, 48
Śyāmānanda Dās, 72, 73, 74, 86, 131, 134, 152
Sylhet, 13, 14, 15, 153, 175

TAGORE, DEVENDRA NATH, 86, 247
Taittirīya Upanishad, 92
Tanjore, 37
Tantras, 3, 9
Tantricism, 3, 9, 10, 12, 71, 184
Tapan Miśra, 25
Tattvabhūshan, Paṇḍit Sītanāth, 253, 255
Taylor, 244, 250
Temples, of the sect, 72, 73, 81, 87, 180 ff.

Tennyson, 229
Teresa, St., 239, 242
Ṭhākurbāni, 153
Ṭhākurghar, 191, 194 ff.
Tilaks, 163, 176
Tinnevelly, 37
Tipperah, 57, 73
Tīrtha, 18, 45
Ṭol, 4, 11, 14, 15, 81, 85
Trance, trances, 19, 21, 24, 33, 50, 237, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 250
Travancore, 37, 38
Tribes and Castes of Bengal, 178
Trichinopoly, 37
Trivandrum, 37
Tukārāma, 42
Tulsī, 163, 177 ; worship of, 196, 198, 199
Typical Selections from Old Bengalī Literature, 108

UDIPI, 37
Ujjvalanīlamaṇi, 136
Umāpati, 4
Underhill, Miss E., 238, 242, 249
Untouchability, 120
Upanishads, 91, 93, 102

VĀCHASPATI, 114
Vaidhi bhakti, 109, 237
Vaikuṇṭha, 101
Vairāgīs, 55, 57, 61, 70, 71, 73 ; no real order of, 161 ; initiation, 162 ff.; monastic life, 166 ff.; rules for, 164-65 ; ideal, 165 ; mendicancy, 167 ; their life, 165 ff., 192-93 ; death customs, 176-77
Vairāgiṇīs, 70, 86 ; how recruited, 171 ff.; not all corrupt, 172 ff.; worship of, 193
Vairāgya, 34, 55
Vairāgya Nirṇay, 165
Vaishṇavism, its poets, 4 ; Scriptures, 6; tantric influence on, 10, 71 ; a popular faith, 75
Vaishṇava Literature of Mediæval Bengal, 147
Vaishṇava Lyrics, 141
Vaishṇava-toshiṇi, 137, 138
Vaishṇavī, 86, 172, 173, 174, 177. See Vairāgiṇī
Vaishṇava Dās, 147
Vaishṇava character, 116 ff.
Vashṇava Rāy, 153
Vallabhāchārya, 8, 49
Vallabhāchāryas, 7, 8, 15
Vāmāchārī, 3, 9, 211
Vamśīdās, 65, 150
Vamśīśikshā, 64, 65, 95, 135
Vamśīvādana, 64, 135
Varṇāśram dharma, 118, 120
Vasu, N. N., 12
Vasudeva, 5
Vasudeva Ghosh, 30, 147
Vedas, 5, 40, 101, 102, 119, 120
Vedānta, 5, 33, 49, 91 ; opposed, 98-99, 102, 228
Vedānta Sūtras, 68, 138, 139
Vedāntist, 33, 34, 46, 53
Vegetarianism, 13, 116, 160
Vicarious suffering, 97
Vidyāpati, 4, 10, 39, 142, 147 ; sensuality, 253, 254-55
Vidhi, 109
Vīrabhadra, 61, 69, 70, 71, 132, 150, 162
Vīra Hamvīra, 72
Vishṇu, 5, 6, 18, 34, 41, 94, 176
Vishṇupad, 18
Vishṇupurī, 88
Vishṇupur, 72, 87
Vishṇupriyā, 16, 31, 65, 73, 86, 135 ; her shrine, 181
Vishṇu Purāṇa, 6
Vishṇusvāmī, 39
Vishṇusvāmīs, 7, 8, 9, 89
Vishvambhar, 13
Visvanātha Chakravartī, 139
Vṛindāban Dās, 125

WESLEYAN Revival, 240
Wilson, H. H., 103
Wise, 182, 199
World, The, its reality, 103; value, 104 ; philosophical view of, 221
Worship, 38, 57, 58, 62 ; of Chaitanya, 64-65 ; 75, 100, 103, 105 ;

at Purī, 114-15; no caste in, 119-20; secret forms, 138, 210-12; in temples, 187-88; in ākhṛās, 188-93; no united, 187; chief end of, 191; the vairāgī's, 192-93; in the home, 193-201; of the tulsī, 196, 198, 199; men's, 196-97; women's, 197-98; public, 201-5
Women, place in the sect, 85-86, 104; learning, 85; in literature, 108; admitted to ascetic life, 164; their worship, 197; in corrupt practices, 210 ff.; in erotic mysticism of Mediæval Church, 248-49

YAMEŚVARṬOṬA ākhṛā, Chaitanya relics in, 184
Yamunā, 47
Yaśovanta Dās, 75
Yātrā, 25, 108
Yoga, 5, 40, 99, 105, 215
Yukti, 101

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